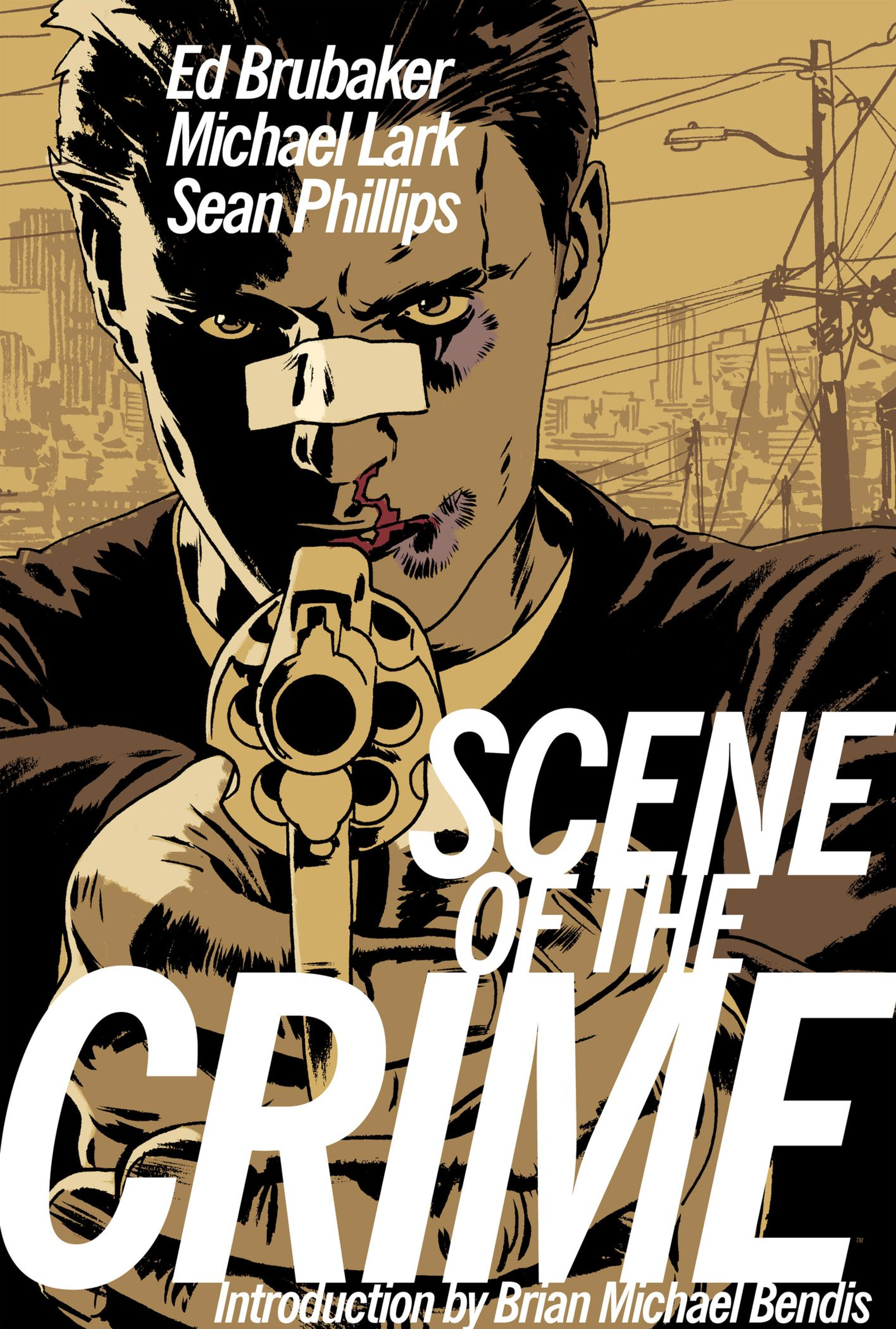

Ed Brubaker
Michael Lark
Sean Phillips

SCENE OF THE CRIME™

Introduction by Brian Michael Bendis

SCENE
OF THE
CRIME

ED BRUBAKER Writer

MICHAEL LARK Penciller

SEAN PHILLIPS / MICHAEL LARK Inkers

JAMES SINCLAIR Colorist

JOHN CONSTANZA Letterer

JENNIFER LEE Assistant Editor

SHELLY BOND Editor

Publication design by SEAN PHILLIPS

Photography by ED BRUBAKER

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SCENE OF THE CRIME

Introduction by Brian Michael Bendis

We are getting to that point in Ed Brubaker's career where no diehard Ed Brubaker fan can agree on what is their favorite Ed Brubaker book. But I, one of the original diehard Ed Brubaker fans, am here to tell you that THIS is my favorite Ed Brubaker book.

This book is one of the very few in the entire world that made me growl to myself "Ugh! I should have thought of this!"

I always get excited when one of my friends or someone I admire comes up with a new idea but I rarely wholeheartedly covet the idea.

Scene of the Crime I covet thee.

This, Buckaroo Banzai and High Fidelity (Original novel and film.)

At the time this book came out both Ed and I were full-blown crime comic creators. In fact, half of our relationship was gathering together with Greg Rucka and Brian Azzarello for group photos and interviews about being the new wave of crime comic creators. Each of us shared an affinity for the same authors and the same classic crime films and each of us were looking for that very special angle that was very specific to us and brought something new to the table.

Ed and I broke into comics around the same time. We were both part of Caliber comics' parade of young talent soon to discover that you don't always get paid for your work and it's time to move on to another publisher.

Ed was writing and drawing a comic book called Lowlife that detailed his every sin as a young man. He was confessing his sins as he did them.

I didn't know Ed back then but I was a big fan. And knowing full well how many comics we sold back then I know that I was one of his very first fans. Sometimes it felt like the only people who were enjoying our Caliber comics where the other people making Caliber comics.

In fact, a lot of the Caliber crew, Mike Oeming, David Mack, Mark Andreyko, hung around together and became very good friends but Ed was on the West Coast, doing whatever he was doing in Lowlife, so we didn't have a lot of opportunity to bond with him. You're thinking to yourself: why didn't you just e-mail him? Well, yes, this was before e-mail. I have officially terribly dated us.

We were all young and trying to figure out what it is we had to offer the world even as we were offering things to the world. From a distance, Ed seemed more evolved as a comics creator than the rest of us. He certainly was more savvy because he was the first of us to leave Caliber. He saw the writing on the wall and bolted.

Some of us were completely shocked by this. A lot of the talent at Caliber were so excited to be in comics and at the same publisher that leaving seemed insane but about a month later when we discovered what he discovered, that the boat was sinking, I remember thinking: this guy is one step ahead.

And that kind of thinking started showing up in his work. All of his projects, in retrospect, were either a few years or many years ahead of the curve.

Sleeper, his Batman run, Catwoman, Scene of the Crime... either in comics, film or television Ed's specific aesthetic can be seen almost anywhere now.

(Except for that Prez one-shot).

Another little tidbit about Ed that I find fascinating is that Ed does not write the way he talks. Almost every writer in the world has a bit of his voice, his actual voice, seeping into the characters or the narrative. Have you ever seen a interview with Stephen King or Neil Gaiman?

But there is almost no trace of Ed's actual voice in his writing voice. Especially in works like this book. I think that shows amazing skill. Before I knew Ed I always imagined him working himself up into some method character so he could start writing.
But no.

There is just Ed the person and Ed the writer.

Ed the person once got off Call of Duty on Xbox because he thought he saw a spider. I never saw that scene show up in his Captain America run.

What Ed, and our Caliber alumni Michael Lark, created here is a classic noir with modern sensibility. In a weird way it reminds me of Robert Altman's ***The Long Goodbye***. Taking the rules of noir and applying them to the now. Except rereading this work everything still feels very modern while that Altman movie has not aged well. Yeah, I said it.

So, please, enjoy this wonderful book by wonderful creators.

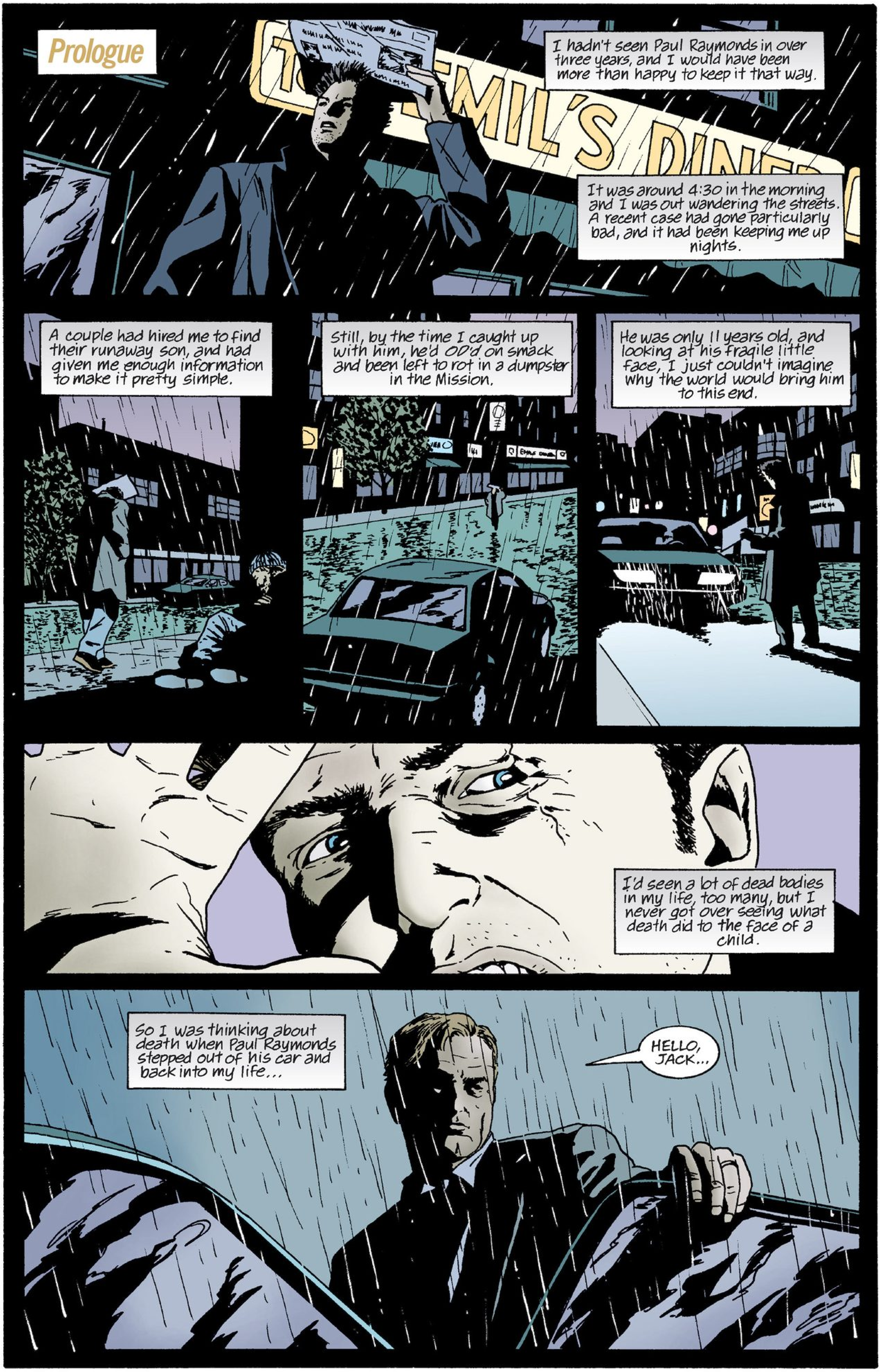
If only so you can properly join us REAL Ed Brubaker fans in deciding what his best work is.

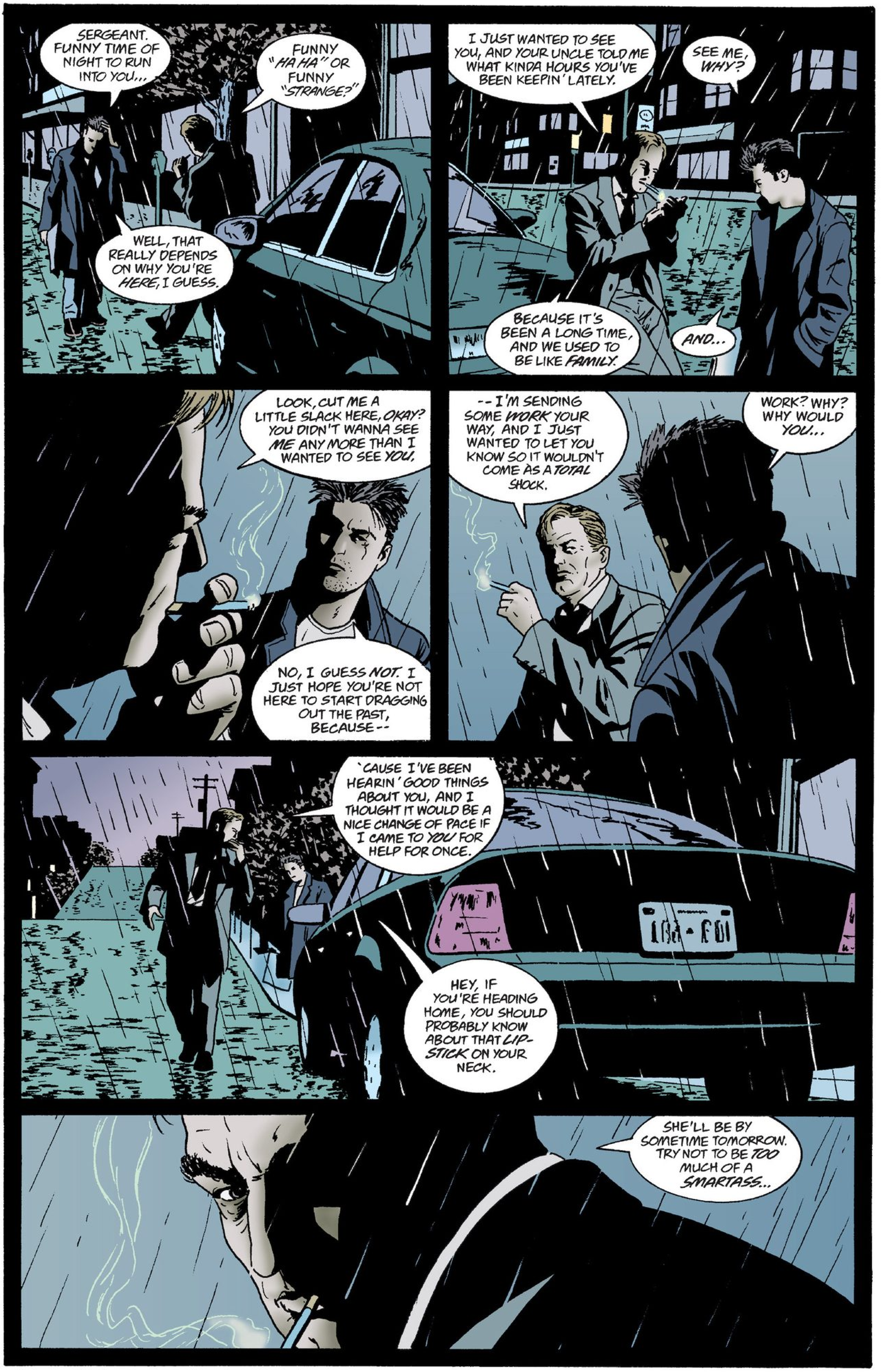
(It's this one.)

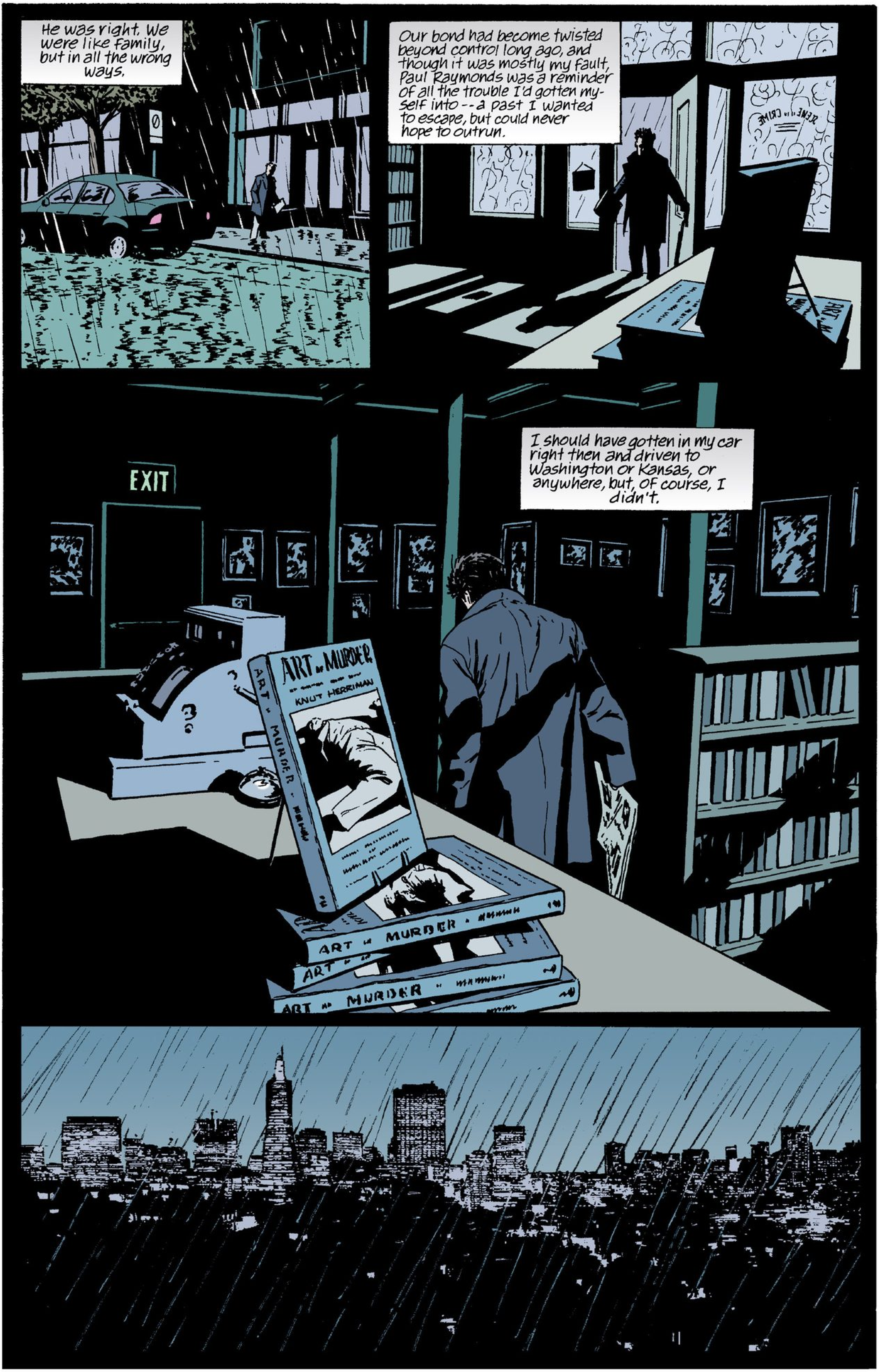
Bendis!
Portland Oregon
September 2012

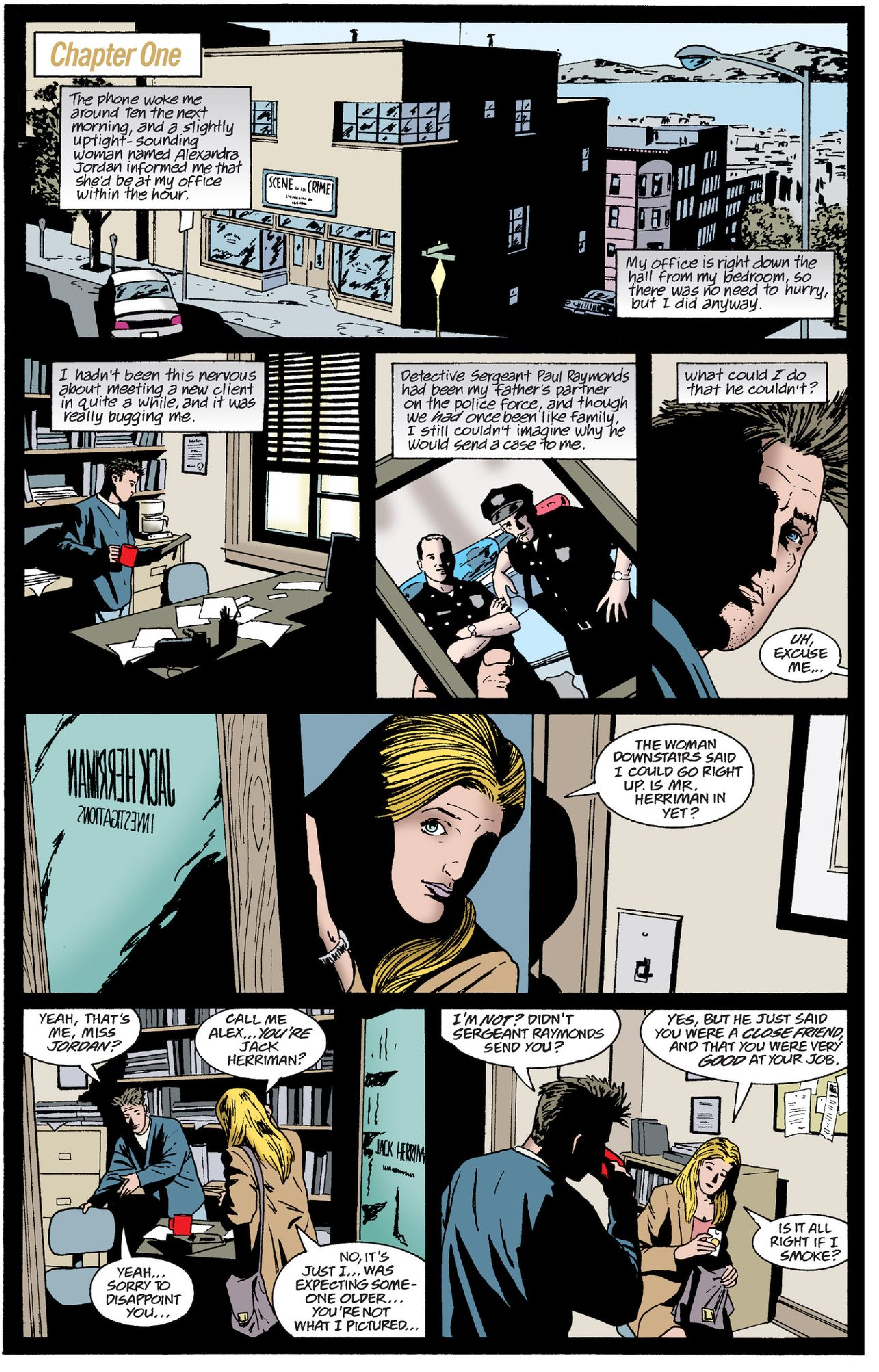
A Little Piece Of Goodnight

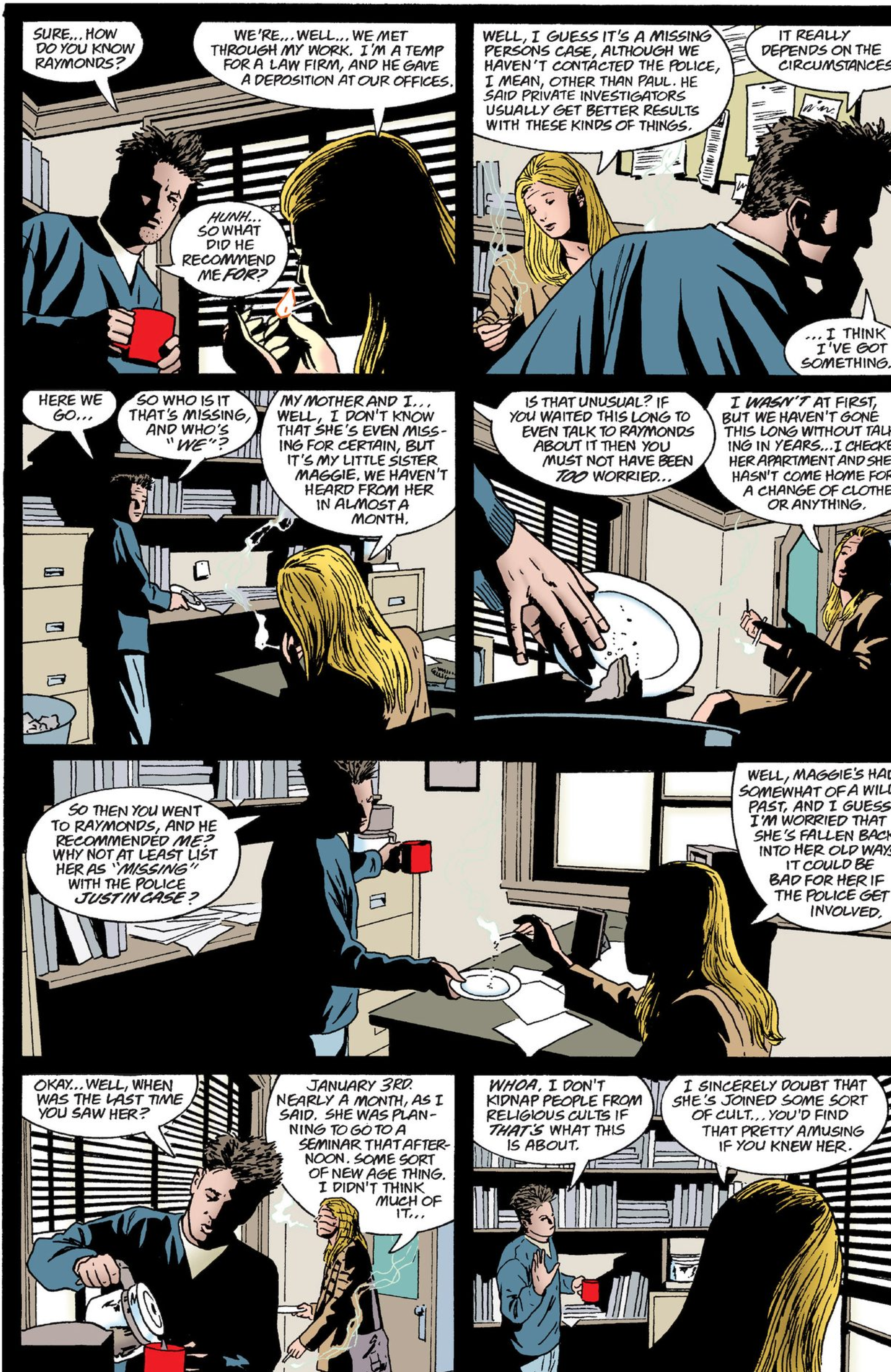
SCENE OF THE CRIME

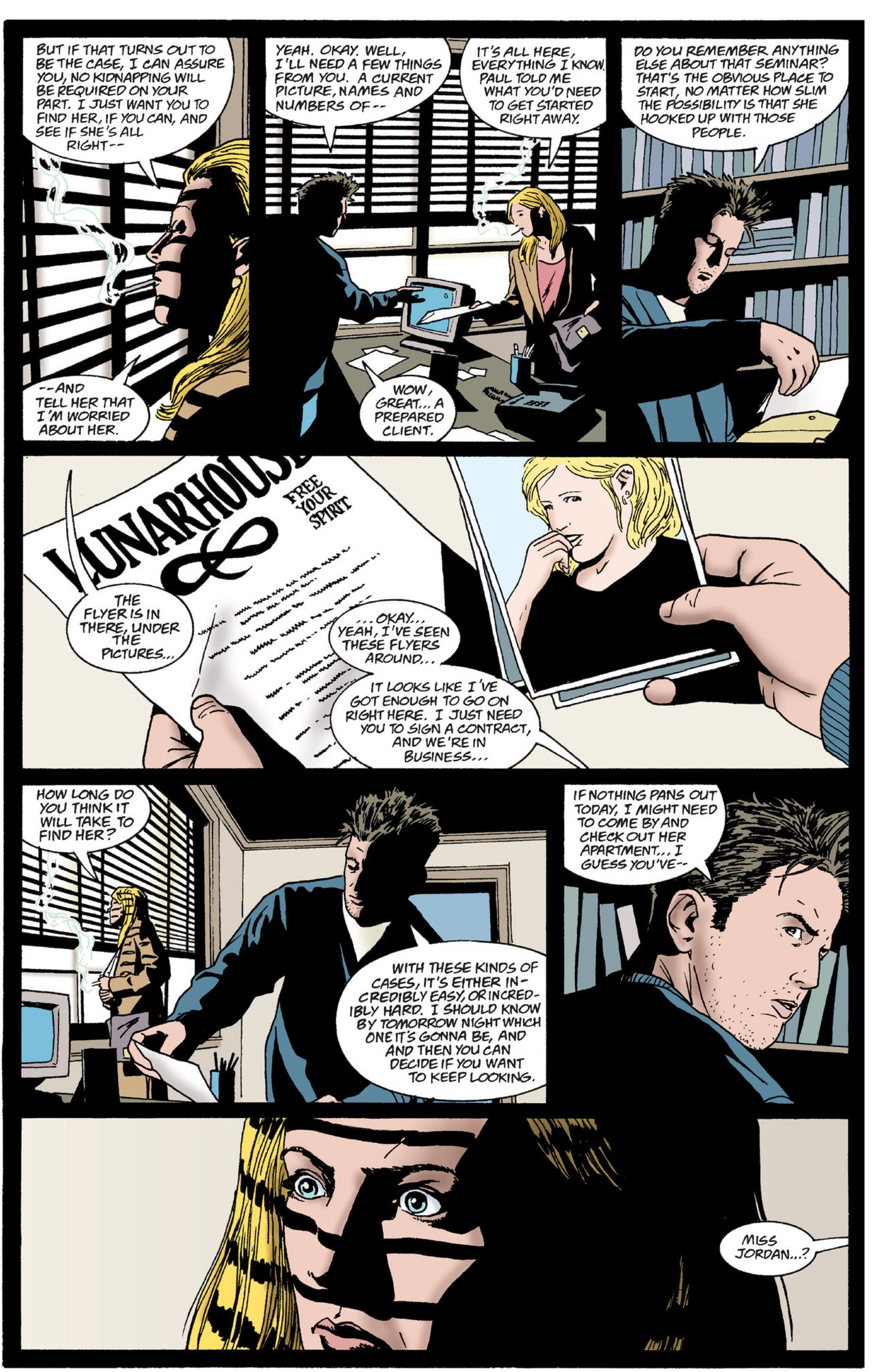

Prologue
I hadn't seen Paul Raymonds in over three years, and I would have been more than happy to keep it that way.
EMIL'S DINER
It was around 4:30 in the morning and I was out wandering the streets. A recent case had gone particularly bad, and it had been keeping me up nights.
A couple had hired me to find their runaway son, and had given me enough information to make it pretty simple.
Still, by the time I caught up with him, he'd OD'd on smack and been left to rot in a dumpster in the Mission.
He was only 11 years old, and looking at his fragile little face, I just couldn't imagine why the world would bring him to this end.
I'd seen a lot of dead bodies in my life, too many, but I never got over seeing what death did to the face of a child.
So I was thinking about death when Paul Raymonds stepped out of his car and back into my life...
HELLO, JACK...


SERGEANT. FUNNY TIME OF NIGHT TO RUN INTO YOU...
FUNNY "*HA HA*" OR FUNNY "*STRANGE?*"
WELL, THAT REALLY DEPENDS ON WHY YOU'RE *HERE*, I GUESS.
I JUST WANTED TO SEE YOU, AND YOUR UNCLE TOLD ME WHAT KINDA HOURS YOU'VE BEEN KEEPIN' LATELY.
SEE ME, *WHY?*
BECAUSE IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, AND WE USED TO BE LIKE *FAMILY.*
AND...
LOOK, CUT ME A LITTLE SLACK HERE, *OKAY?* YOU DIDN'T WANNA SEE *ME* ANY MORE THAN I WANTED TO SEE *YOU.*
NO, I GUESS *NOT.* I JUST HOPE YOU'RE NOT HERE TO START DRAGGING OUT THE PAST, BECAUSE--
--I'M SENDING SOME *WORK* YOUR WAY, AND I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW SO IT WOULDN'T COME AS A *TOTAL* SHOCK.
WORK? WHY? WHY WOULD *YOU*...
'CAUSE I'VE BEEN HEARIN' GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOU, AND I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A NICE CHANGE OF PACE IF I CAME TO *YOU* FOR HELP FOR ONCE.
HEY, IF YOU'RE HEADING HOME, YOU SHOULD PROBABLY KNOW ABOUT THAT *LIP-STICK* ON YOUR NECK.
SHE'LL BE BY SOMETIME TOMORROW. TRY NOT TO BE *TOO* MUCH OF A *SMARTASS*...

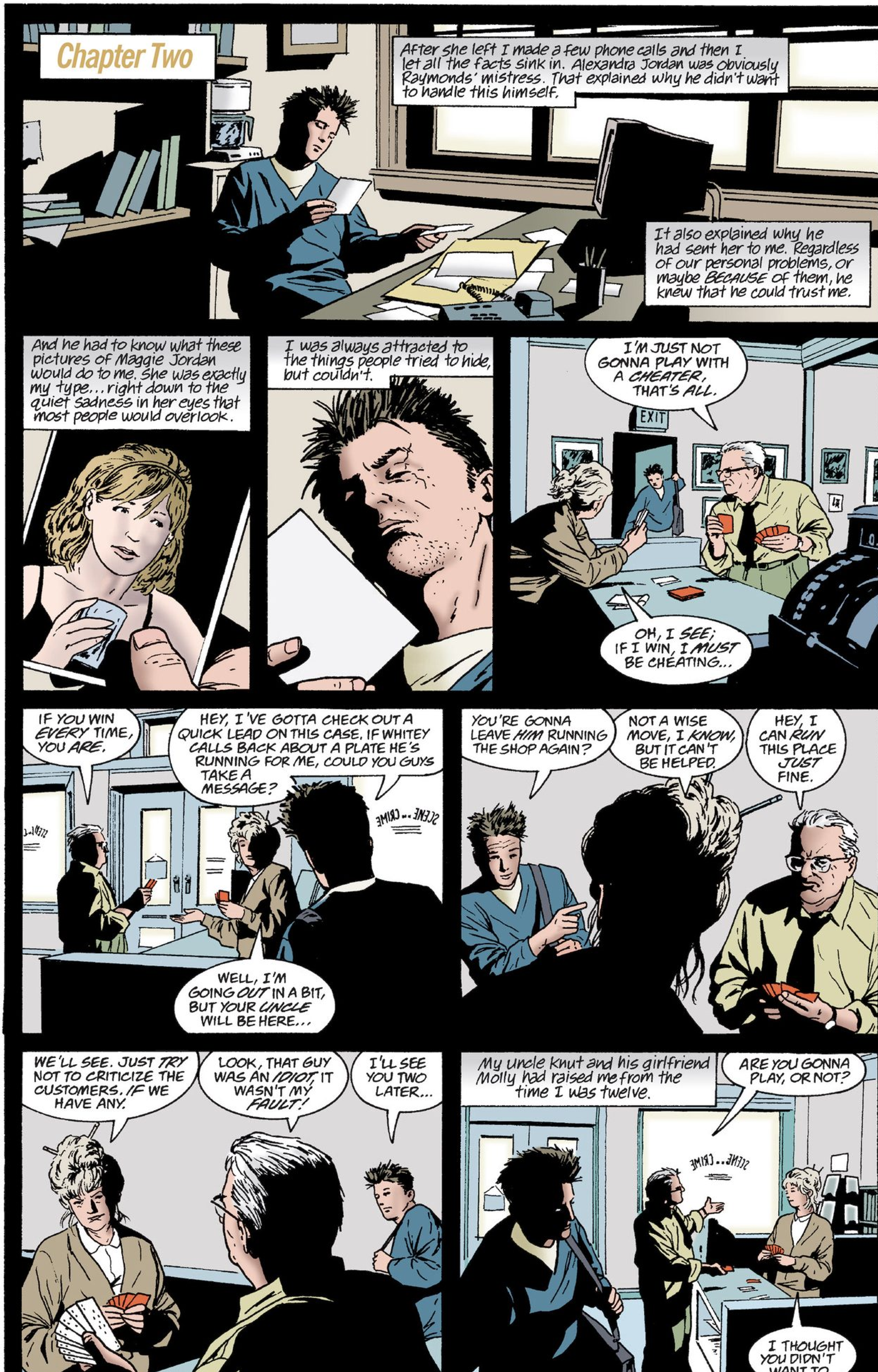

He was right. We were like family, but in all the wrong ways.
Our bond had become twisted beyond control long ago, and though it was mostly my fault, Paul Raymonds was a reminder of all the trouble I'd gotten myself into -- a past I wanted to escape, but could never hope to outrun.
I should have gotten in my car right then and driven to Washington or Kansas, or anywhere, but, of course, I didn't.
EXIT
ART of MURDER
KNUT HERRIMAN
ART of MURDER
ART of MURDER
ART of MURDER

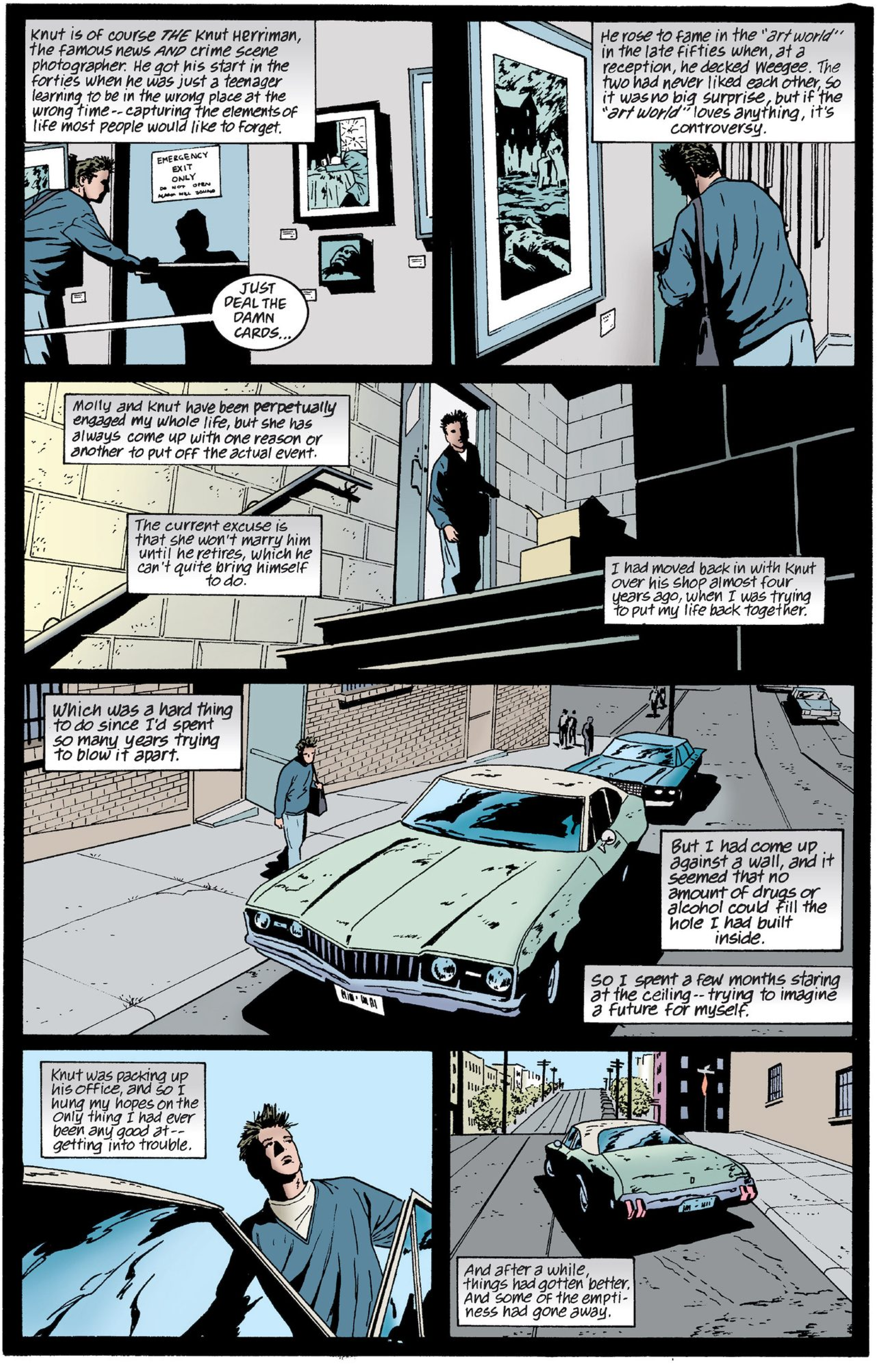

Chapter One
The phone woke me around ten the next morning, and a slightly uptight-sounding woman named Alexandra Jordan informed me that she'd be at my office within the hour.
SCENE CRIME
My office is right down the hall from my bedroom, so there was no need to hurry, but I did anyway.
I hadn't been this nervous about meeting a new client in quite a while, and it was really bugging me.
Detective Sergeant Paul Raymonds had been my father's partner on the police force, and though we *had* once been like family, I still couldn't imagine why he would send a case to me.
What could *I* do that he couldn't?
UH, EXCUSE ME...
JACK HERRIMAN INVESTIGATIONS
THE WOMAN DOWNSTAIRS SAID I COULD GO RIGHT UP. IS MR. HERRIMAN IN YET?
YEAH, THAT'S ME, MISS JORDAN?
CALL ME ALEX... *YOU'RE* JACK HERRIMAN?
JACK HERRIM
YEAH... SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU...
NO, IT'S JUST I... WAS EXPECTING SOMEONE OLDER... YOU'RE NOT WHAT I PICTURED...
I'M *NOT*? DIDN'T SERGEANT RAYMONDS SEND YOU?
YES, BUT HE JUST SAID YOU WERE A *CLOSE FRIEND*, AND THAT YOU WERE VERY *GOOD* AT YOUR JOB.
IS IT ALL RIGHT IF I SMOKE?


SURE... HOW DO YOU KNOW RAYMONDS?
WE'RE... WELL... WE MET THROUGH MY WORK. I'M A TEMP FOR A LAW FIRM, AND HE GAVE A DEPOSITION AT OUR OFFICES.
HUNH... SO WHAT DID HE RECOMMEND ME FOR?
WELL, I GUESS IT'S A MISSING PERSONS CASE, ALTHOUGH WE HAVEN'T CONTACTED THE POLICE, I MEAN, OTHER THAN PAUL. HE SAID PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS USUALLY GET BETTER RESULTS WITH THESE KINDS OF THINGS.
IT REALLY DEPENDS ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES...
...I THINK I'VE GOT SOMETHING...
HERE WE GO...
SO WHO IS IT THAT'S MISSING, AND WHO'S "WE"?
MY MOTHER AND I... WELL, I DON'T KNOW THAT SHE'S EVEN MISSING FOR CERTAIN, BUT IT'S MY LITTLE SISTER MAGGIE. WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HER IN ALMOST A MONTH.
IS THAT UNUSUAL? IF YOU WAITED THIS LONG TO EVEN TALK TO RAYMONDS ABOUT IT THEN YOU MUST NOT HAVE BEEN TOO WORRIED...
I WASN'T AT FIRST, BUT WE HAVEN'T GONE THIS LONG WITHOUT TALKING IN YEARS... I CHECKED HER APARTMENT AND SHE HASN'T COME HOME FOR A CHANGE OF CLOTHES OR ANYTHING.
SO THEN YOU WENT TO RAYMONDS, AND HE RECOMMENDED ME? WHY NOT AT LEAST LIST HER AS "MISSING" WITH THE POLICE JUST IN CASE?
WELL, MAGGIE'S HAD SOMEWHAT OF A WILD PAST, AND I GUESS I'M WORRIED THAT SHE'S FALLEN BACK INTO HER OLD WAYS. IT COULD BE BAD FOR HER IF THE POLICE GET INVOLVED.
OKAY... WELL, WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW HER?
JANUARY 3RD. NEARLY A MONTH, AS I SAID. SHE WAS PLANNING TO GO TO A SEMINAR THAT AFTERNOON. SOME SORT OF NEW AGE THING. I DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF IT...
WHOA. I DON'T KIDNAP PEOPLE FROM RELIGIOUS CULTS IF THAT'S WHAT THIS IS ABOUT.
I SINCERELY DOUBT THAT SHE'S JOINED SOME SORT OF CULT... YOU'D FIND THAT PRETTY AMUSING IF YOU KNEW HER.

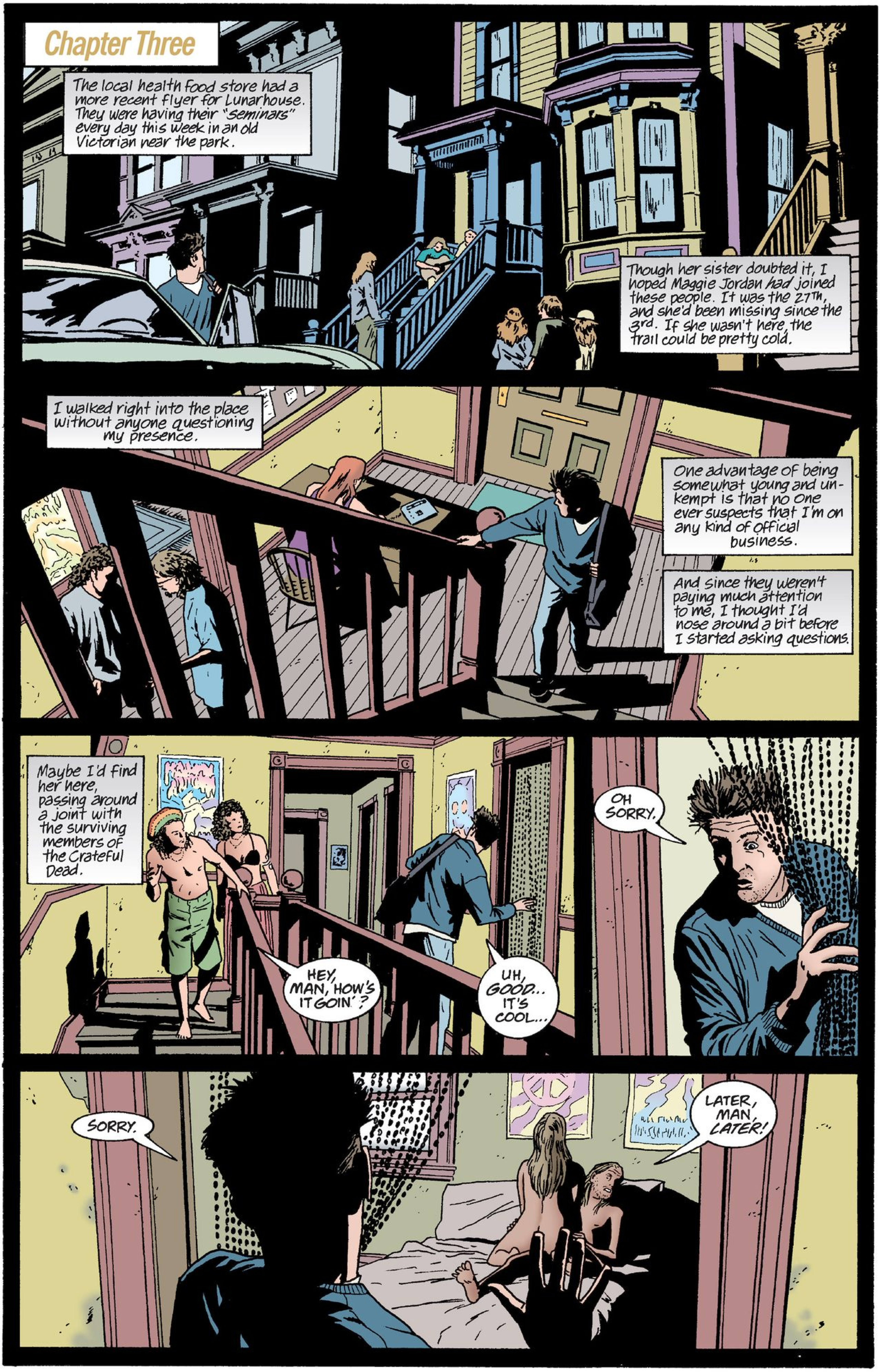

BUT IF THAT TURNS OUT TO BE THE CASE, I CAN ASSURE YOU, NO KIDNAPPING WILL BE REQUIRED ON YOUR PART. I JUST WANT YOU TO FIND HER, IF YOU CAN, AND SEE IF SHE'S ALL RIGHT--
--AND TELL HER THAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT HER.
YEAH. OKAY. WELL, I'LL NEED A FEW THINGS FROM YOU. A CURRENT PICTURE, NAMES AND NUMBERS OF--
IT'S ALL HERE, EVERYTHING I KNOW. PAUL TOLD ME WHAT YOU'D NEED TO GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY.
WOW, GREAT... A PREPARED CLIENT.
DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT THAT SEMINAR? THAT'S THE OBVIOUS PLACE TO START, NO MATTER HOW SLIM THE POSSIBILITY IS THAT SHE HOOKED UP WITH THOSE PEOPLE.
LUNARHOUSE
FREE YOUR SPIRIT
THE FLYER IS IN THERE, UNDER THE PICTURES...
...OKAY... YEAH, I'VE SEEN THESE FLYERS AROUND...
IT LOOKS LIKE I'VE GOT ENOUGH TO GO ON RIGHT HERE. I JUST NEED YOU TO SIGN A CONTRACT, AND WE'RE IN BUSINESS...
HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WILL TAKE TO FIND HER?
WITH THESE KINDS OF CASES, IT'S EITHER INCREDIBLY EASY, OR INCREDIBLY HARD. I SHOULD KNOW BY TOMORROW NIGHT WHICH ONE IT'S GONNA BE, AND AND THEN YOU CAN DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO KEEP LOOKING.
IF NOTHING PANS OUT TODAY, I MIGHT NEED TO COME BY AND CHECK OUT HER APARTMENT... I GUESS YOU'VE--
MISS JORDAN...?

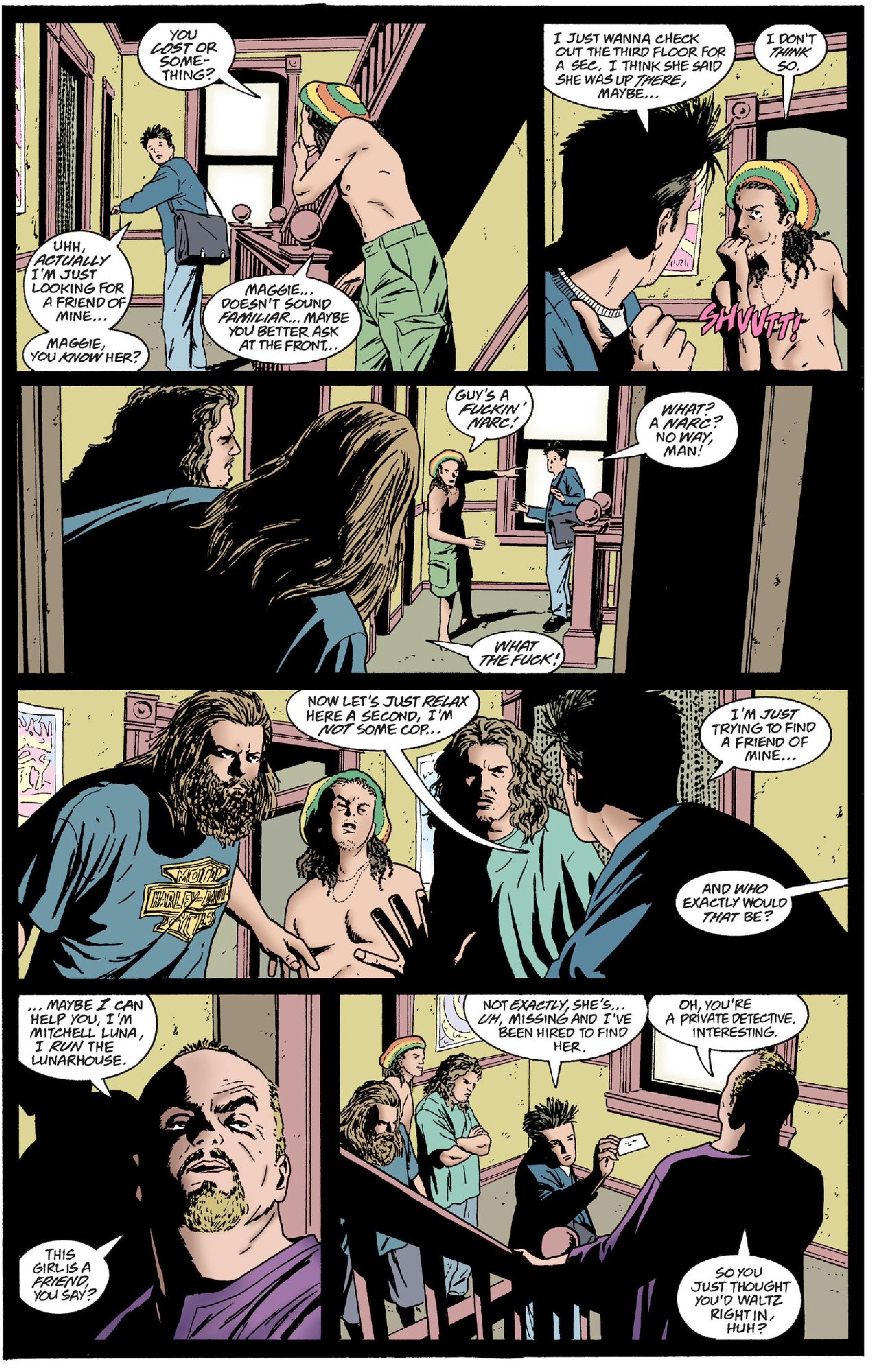
Chapter Two

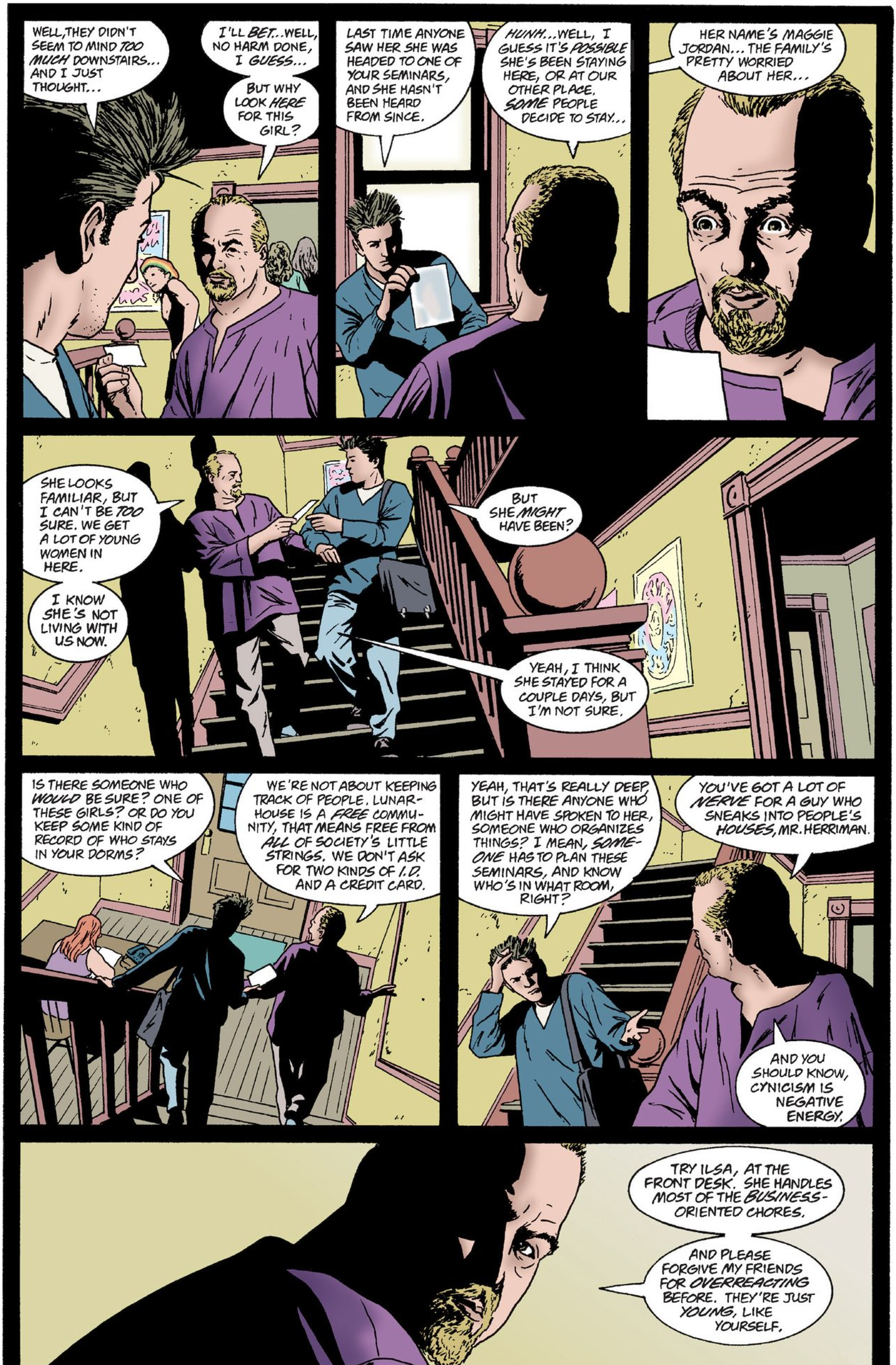

After she left I made a few phone calls and then I let all the facts sink in. Alexandra Jordan was obviously Raymonds' mistress. That explained why he didn't want to handle this himself.
It also explained why he had sent her to me. Regardless of our personal problems, or maybe BECAUSE of them, he knew that he could trust me.
And he had to know what these pictures of Maggie Jordan would do to me. She was exactly my type... right down to the quiet sadness in her eyes that most people would overlook.
I was always attracted to the things people tried to hide, but couldn't.
I'M JUST NOT GONNA PLAY WITH A CHEATER, THAT'S ALL.
EXIT
OH, I SEE; IF I WIN, I MUST BE CHEATING...
IF YOU WIN EVERY TIME, YOU ARE.
HEY, I'VE GOTTA CHECK OUT A QUICK LEAD ON THIS CASE. IF WHITEY CALLS BACK ABOUT A PLATE HE'S RUNNING FOR ME, COULD YOU GUYS TAKE A MESSAGE?
WELL, I'M GOING OUT IN A BIT, BUT YOUR UNCLE WILL BE HERE...
YOU'RE GONNA LEAVE HIM RUNNING THE SHOP AGAIN?
NOT A WISE MOVE, I KNOW, BUT IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
HEY, I CAN RUN THIS PLACE JUST FINE.
WE'LL SEE. JUST TRY NOT TO CRITICIZE THE CUSTOMERS. IF WE HAVE ANY.
LOOK, THAT GUY WAS AN IDIOT, IT WASN'T MY FAULT!
I'LL SEE YOU TWO LATER...
My uncle Knut and his girlfriend Molly had raised me from the time I was twelve.
ARE YOU GONNA PLAY, OR NOT?
I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO.

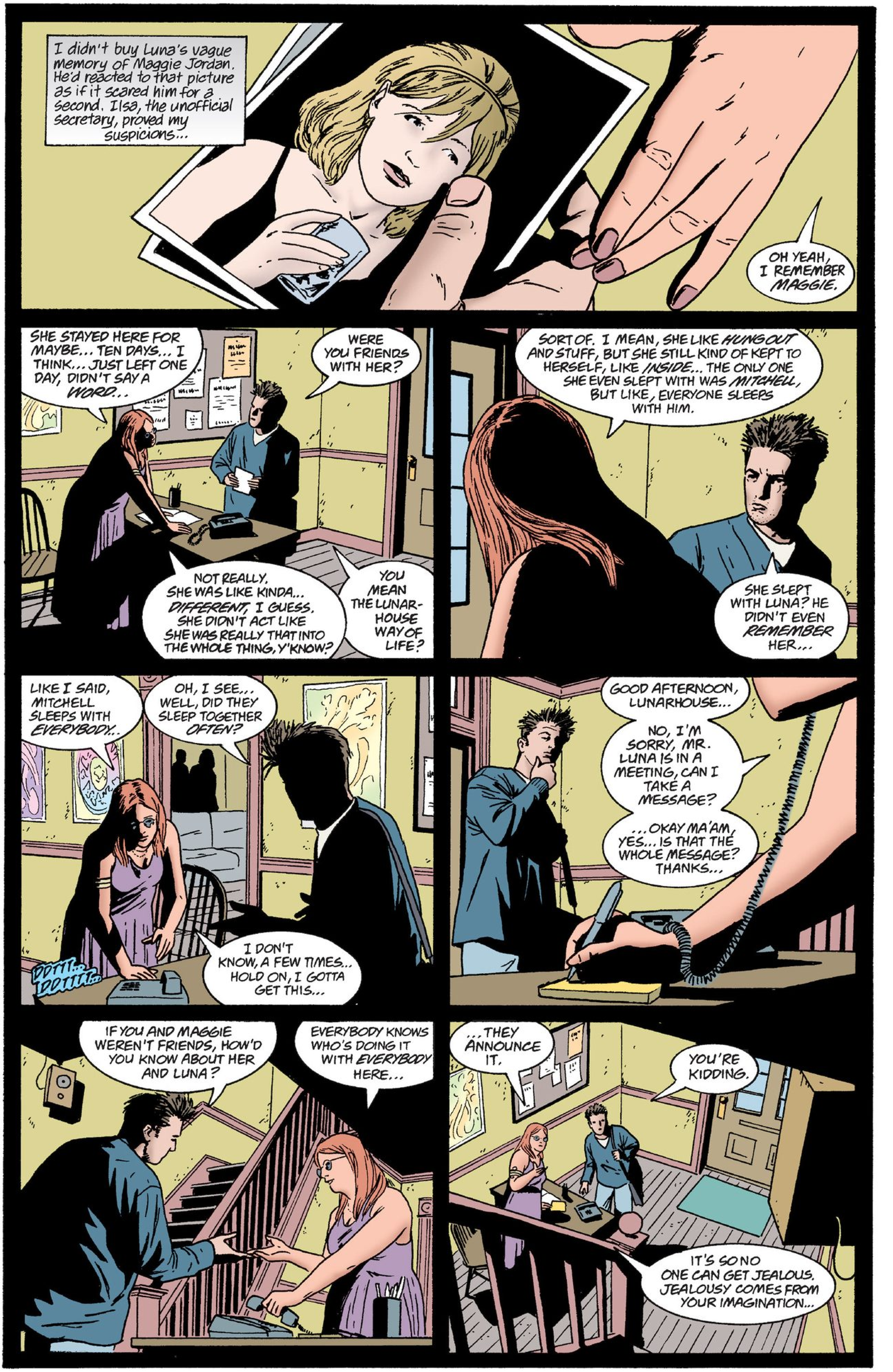

Knut is of course *THE* Knut Herriman, the famous news *AND* crime scene photographer. He got his start in the forties when he was just a teenager learning to be in the wrong place at the wrong time -- capturing the elements of life most people would like to forget.
EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY DO NOT OPEN ALARM WILL SOUND
JUST DEAL THE DAMN CARDS...
He rose to fame in the "*art world*" in the late fifties when, at a reception, he decked Weegee. The two had never liked each other, so it was no big surprise, but if the "*art world*" loves anything, it's controversy.
Molly and Knut have been perpetually engaged my whole life, but she has always come up with one reason or another to put off the actual event.
The current excuse is that she won't marry him until he retires, which he can't quite bring himself to do.
I had moved back in with Knut over his shop almost four years ago, when I was trying to put my life back together.
Which was a hard thing to do since I'd spent so many years trying to blow it apart.
But I had come up against a wall, and it seemed that no amount of drugs or alcohol could fill the hole I had built inside.
So I spent a few months staring at the ceiling -- trying to imagine a future for myself.
Knut was packing up his office, and so I hung my hopes on the only thing I had ever been any good at -- getting into trouble.
And after a while, things had gotten better. And some of the emptiness had gone away.

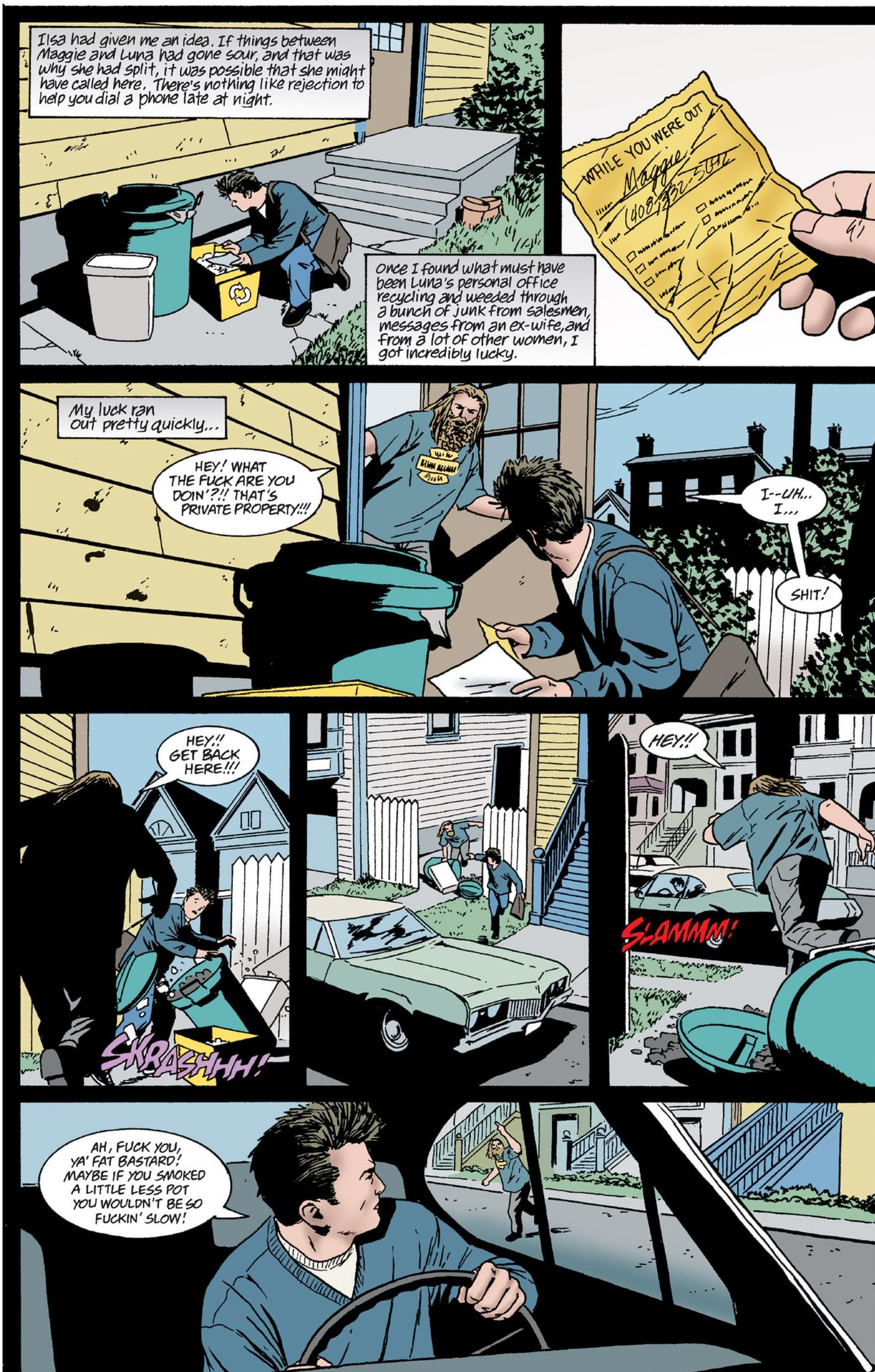
Chapter Three

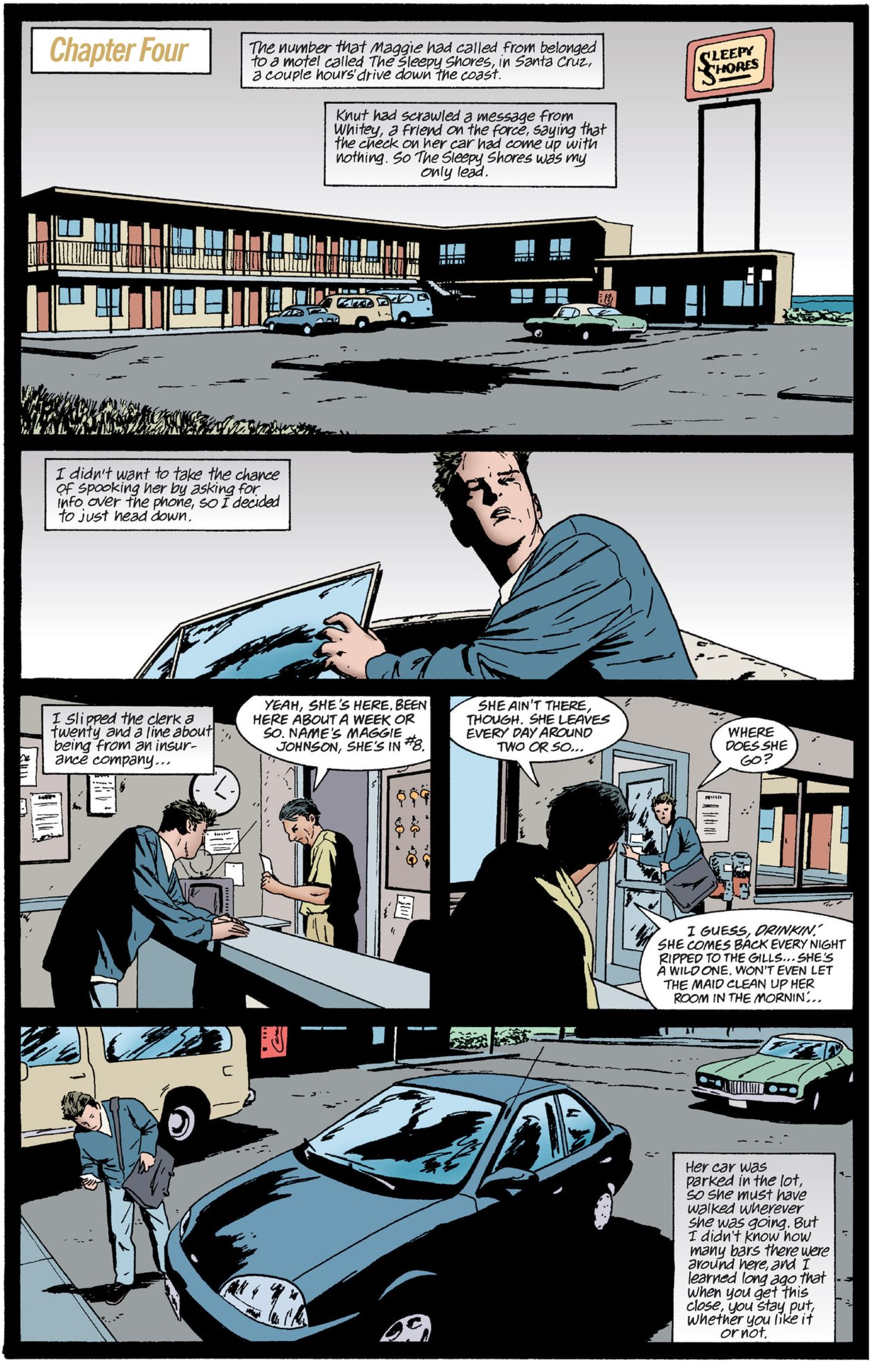

The local health food store had a more recent flyer for Lunarhouse. They were having their "seminars" every day this week in an old Victorian near the park.
Though her sister doubted it, I hoped Maggie Jordan *had* joined these people. It was the 27th, and she'd been missing since the 3rd. If she wasn't here, the trail could be pretty cold.
I walked right into the place without anyone questioning my presence.
One advantage of being somewhat young and unkempt is that no one ever suspects that I'm on any kind of official business.
And since they weren't paying much attention to me, I thought I'd nose around a bit before I started asking questions.
Maybe I'd find her here, passing around a joint with the surviving members of the Grateful Dead.
HEY, MAN, HOW'S IT GOIN'?
UH, *GOOD*... IT'S COOL...
OH SORRY.
SORRY.
LATER, MAN, *LATER!*

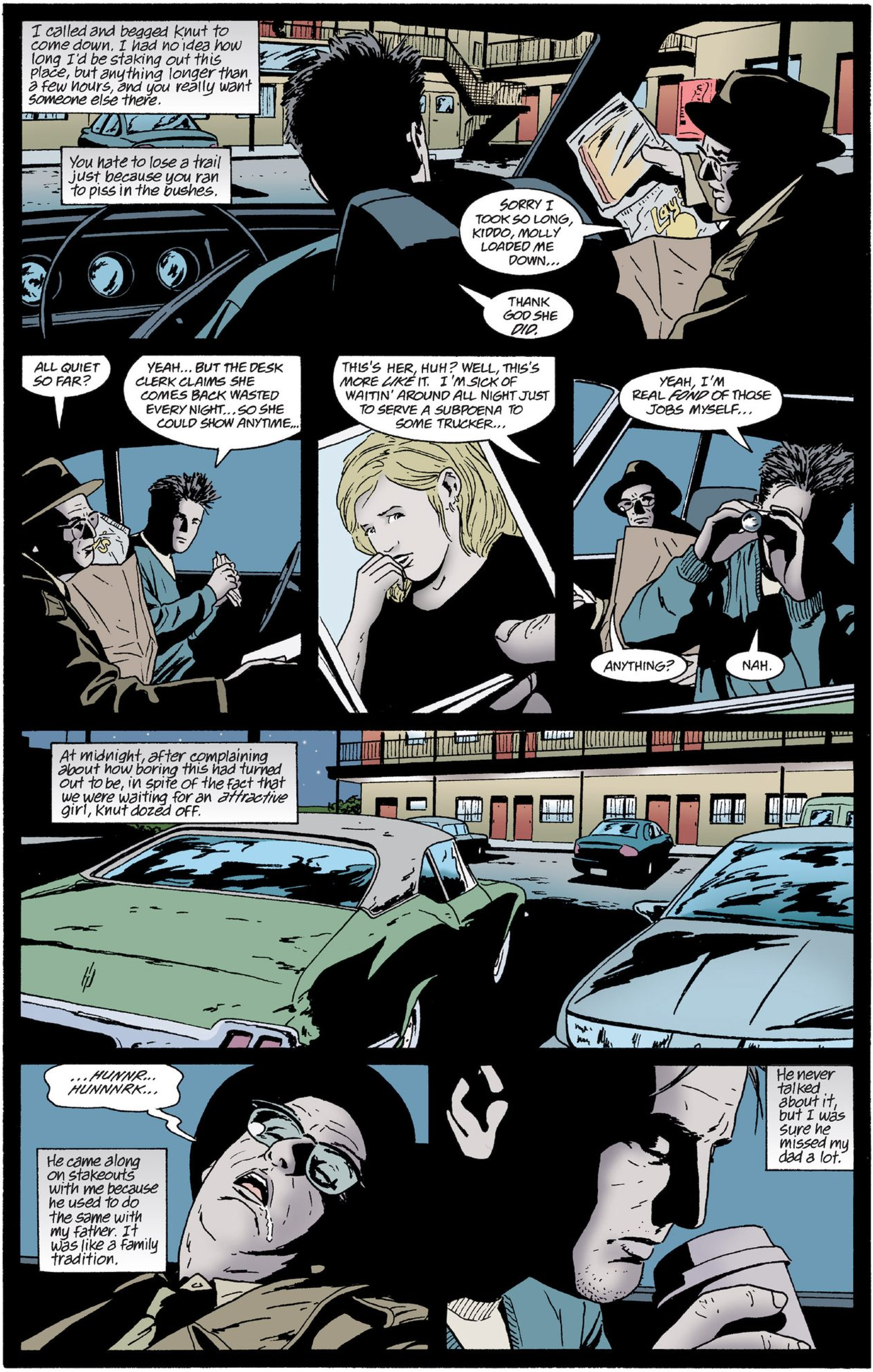

YOU *LOST* OR SOME-THING?
UHH, *ACTUALLY* I'M JUST LOOKING FOR A FRIEND OF MINE...
MAGGIE, YOU *KNOW* HER?
MAGGIE... DOESN'T SOUND *FAMILIAR*... MAYBE YOU BETTER ASK AT THE FRONT...
I JUST WANNA CHECK OUT THE THIRD FLOOR FOR A SEC. I THINK SHE SAID SHE WAS UP *THERE*, MAYBE...
I DON'T *THINK* SO.
SHVUTT!
GUY'S A *FUCKIN'* NARC!
WHAT? A NARC? NO WAY, MAN!
WHAT THE FUCK!
NOW LET'S JUST *RELAX* HERE A SECOND, I'M *NOT* SOME COP...
I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND A FRIEND OF MINE...
AND *WHO* EXACTLY WOULD *THAT* BE?
... MAYBE *I* CAN HELP YOU, I'M MITCHELL LUNA, I *RUN* THE LUNARHOUSE.
THIS GIRL IS A *FRIEND*, YOU SAY?
NOT *EXACTLY*, SHE'S... *UH*, MISSING AND I'VE BEEN HIRED TO FIND HER.
OH, YOU'RE A PRIVATE DETECTIVE, INTERESTING.
SO YOU JUST THOUGHT YOU'D WALTZ RIGHT IN, HUH?

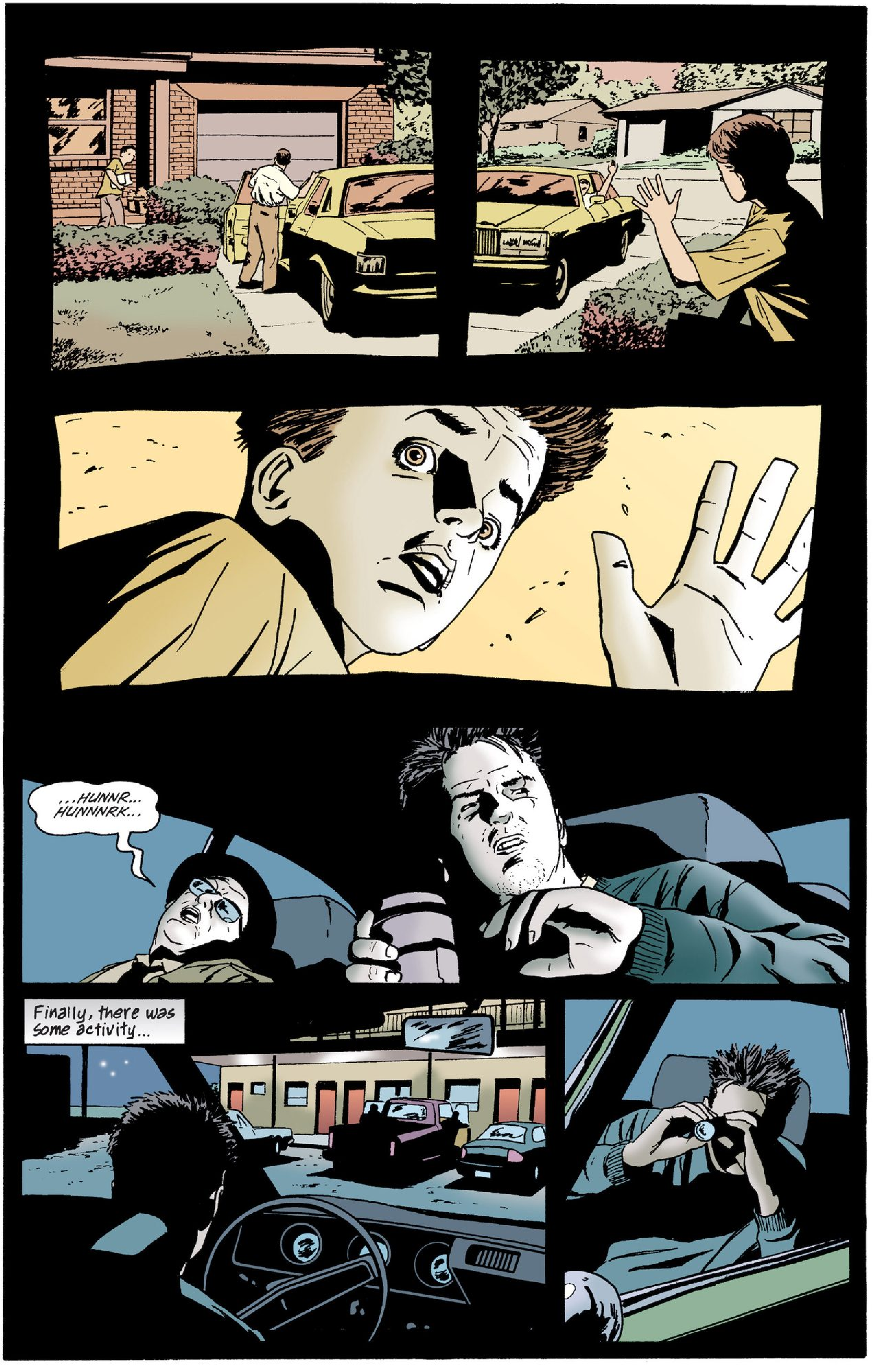

WELL, THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO MIND *TOO MUCH* DOWNSTAIRS... AND I JUST THOUGHT...
I'LL *BET*... WELL, NO HARM DONE, I *GUESS*...
BUT WHY LOOK *HERE* FOR THIS GIRL?
LAST TIME ANYONE SAW HER SHE WAS HEADED TO ONE OF YOUR SEMINARS, AND SHE HASN'T BEEN HEARD FROM SINCE.
HUNH... WELL, I GUESS IT'S *POSSIBLE* SHE'S BEEN STAYING HERE, OR AT OUR OTHER PLACE. *SOME* PEOPLE DECIDE TO STAY...
HER NAME'S *MAGGIE JORDAN*... THE FAMILY'S PRETTY WORRIED ABOUT HER...
SHE LOOKS FAMILIAR, BUT I CAN'T BE *TOO* SURE. WE GET A LOT OF YOUNG WOMEN IN HERE.
I KNOW *SHE'S* NOT LIVING WITH US NOW.
BUT SHE *MIGHT* HAVE BEEN?
YEAH, I THINK SHE STAYED FOR A COUPLE DAYS, BUT I'M NOT SURE.
IS THERE SOMEONE WHO *WOULD* BE SURE? ONE OF THESE GIRLS? OR DO YOU KEEP SOME KIND OF RECORD OF WHO STAYS IN YOUR DORMS?
WE'RE NOT ABOUT KEEPING TRACK OF PEOPLE. LUNARHOUSE IS A *FREE* COMMUNITY, THAT MEANS FREE FROM *ALL* OF SOCIETY'S LITTLE STRINGS. WE DON'T ASK FOR TWO KINDS OF *I.D.* AND A CREDIT CARD.
YEAH, THAT'S REALLY DEEP, BUT IS THERE ANYONE WHO MIGHT HAVE SPOKEN TO HER, SOMEONE WHO ORGANIZES THINGS? I MEAN, *SOMEONE* HAS TO PLAN THESE SEMINARS, AND KNOW WHO'S IN WHAT ROOM, RIGHT?
YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF *NERVE* FOR A GUY WHO SNEAKS INTO PEOPLE'S *HOUSES*, MR. HERRIMAN.
AND YOU SHOULD KNOW, CYNICISM IS NEGATIVE ENERGY.
TRY ILSA, AT THE FRONT DESK. SHE HANDLES MOST OF THE *BUSINESS*-ORIENTED CHORES.
AND PLEASE FORGIVE MY FRIENDS FOR *OVERREACTING* BEFORE. THEY'RE JUST *YOUNG*, LIKE YOURSELF.

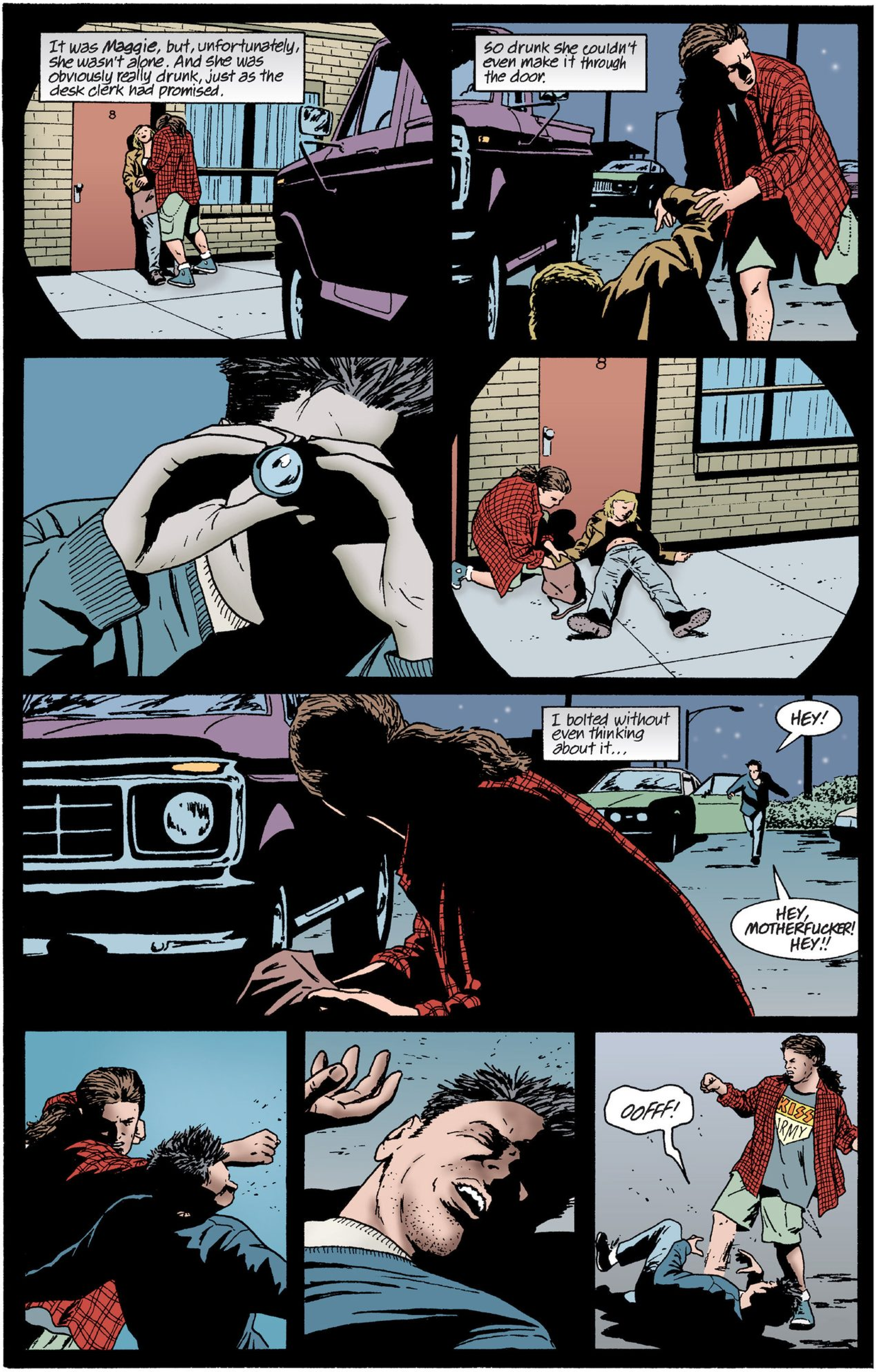

I didn't buy Luna's vague memory of Maggie Jordan. He'd reacted to that picture as if it scared him for a second. Ilsa, the unofficial secretary, proved my suspicions...
OH YEAH, I REMEMBER *MAGGIE*.
SHE STAYED HERE FOR MAYBE... TEN DAYS... I THINK... JUST LEFT ONE DAY, DIDN'T SAY A *WORD*...
WERE YOU FRIENDS WITH HER?
NOT REALLY. SHE WAS LIKE KINDA... *DIFFERENT*, I GUESS. SHE DIDN'T ACT LIKE SHE WAS REALLY THAT INTO THE WHOLE THING, Y'KNOW?
YOU MEAN THE LUNARHOUSE WAY OF LIFE?
SORT OF. I MEAN, SHE LIKE *HUNG OUT* AND STUFF, BUT SHE STILL KIND OF KEPT TO HERSELF, LIKE *INSIDE*... THE ONLY ONE SHE EVEN SLEPT WITH WAS *MITCHELL*, BUT LIKE, EVERYONE SLEEPS WITH HIM.
SHE SLEPT WITH LUNA? HE DIDN'T EVEN *REMEMBER* HER...
LIKE I SAID, MITCHELL SLEEPS WITH *EVERYBODY*...
OH, I SEE... WELL, DID THEY SLEEP TOGETHER *OFTEN*?
DDTTT... DDTTTT...
I DON'T KNOW, A FEW TIMES... HOLD ON, I GOTTA GET THIS...
GOOD AFTERNOON, LUNARHOUSE...
NO, I'M SORRY, MR. LUNA IS IN A MEETING, CAN I TAKE A MESSAGE?
...OKAY MA'AM, YES... IS THAT THE WHOLE MESSAGE? THANKS...
IF YOU AND MAGGIE WEREN'T FRIENDS, HOW'D YOU KNOW ABOUT HER AND LUNA?
EVERYBODY KNOWS WHO'S DOING IT WITH *EVERYBODY* HERE...
...THEY ANNOUNCE IT.
YOU'RE KIDDING.
IT'S SO NO ONE CAN GET JEALOUS. JEALOUSY COMES FROM YOUR IMAGINATION...

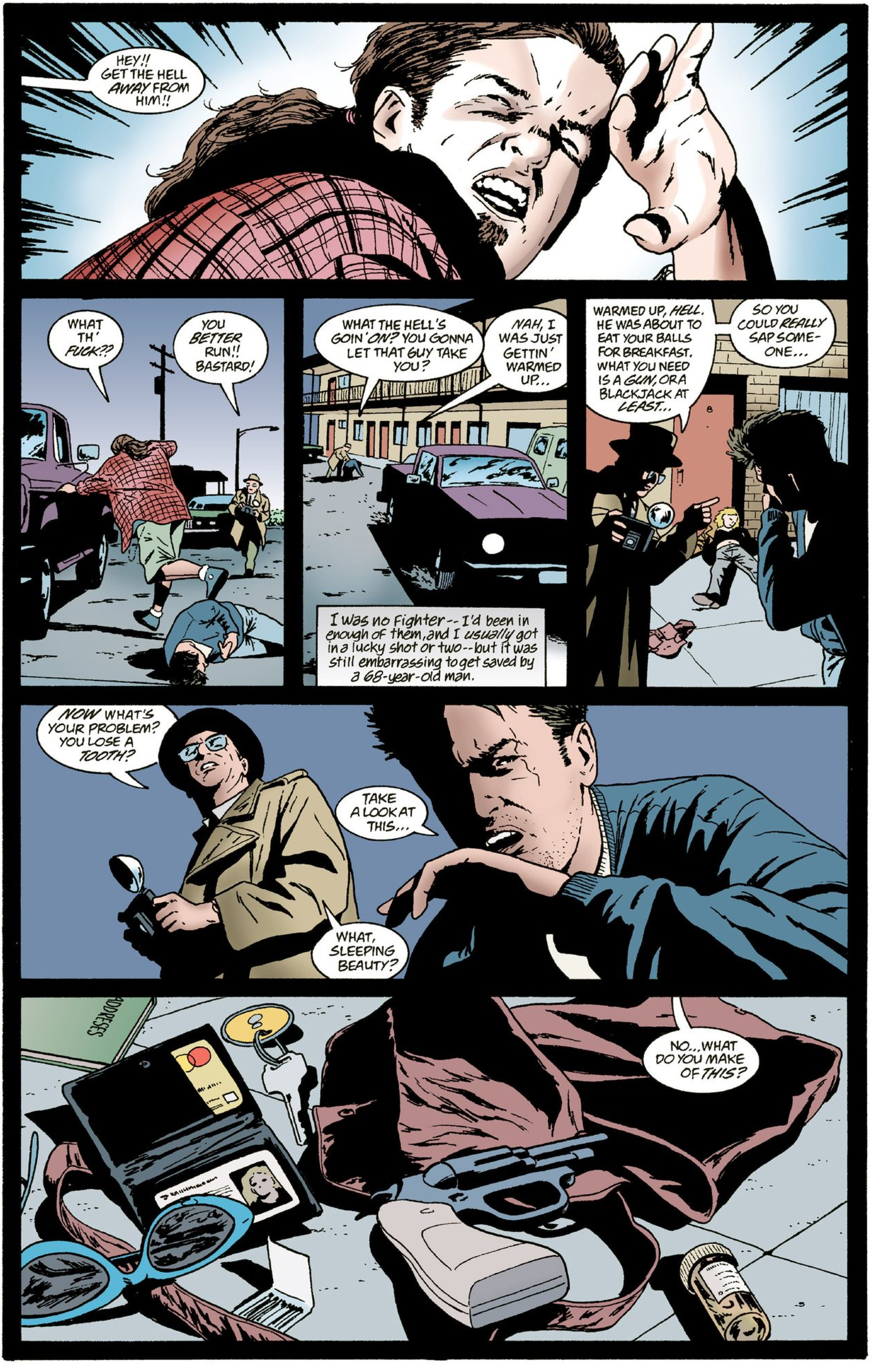

Ilsa had given me an idea. If things between Maggie and Luna had gone sour, and that was why she had split, it was possible that she might have called here. There's nothing like rejection to help you dial a phone late at night.
Once I found what must have been Luna's personal office recycling and weeded through a bunch of junk from salesmen, messages from an ex-wife, and from a lot of other women, I got incredibly lucky.
WHILE YOU WERE OUT
Maggie
(408)332-5042
My luck ran out pretty quickly...
HEY! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOIN'?!! THAT'S PRIVATE PROPERTY!!!
I--UH... I...
SHIT!
HEY!! GET BACK HERE!!!
SKRASHHH!
HEY!!
SLAMMM!
AH, FUCK YOU, YA' FAT BASTARD! MAYBE IF YOU SMOKED A LITTLE LESS POT YOU WOULDN'T BE SO FUCKIN' SLOW!


Chapter Four
The number that Maggie had called from belonged to a motel called The Sleepy Shores, in Santa Cruz, a couple hours' drive down the coast.
SLEEPY SHORES
Knut had scrawled a message from Whitey, a friend on the force, saying that the check on her car had come up with nothing. So The Sleepy Shores was my only lead.
I didn't want to take the chance of spooking her by asking for info over the phone, so I decided to just head down.
I slipped the clerk a twenty and a line about being from an insurance company…
YEAH, SHE'S HERE. BEEN HERE ABOUT A WEEK OR SO. NAME'S MAGGIE JOHNSON, SHE'S IN #8.
SHE AIN'T THERE, THOUGH. SHE LEAVES EVERY DAY AROUND TWO OR SO…
WHERE DOES SHE GO?
I GUESS, DRINKIN'. SHE COMES BACK EVERY NIGHT RIPPED TO THE GILLS… SHE'S A WILD ONE. WON'T EVEN LET THE MAID CLEAN UP HER ROOM IN THE MORNIN'…
Her car was parked in the lot, so she must have walked wherever she was going. But I didn't know how many bars there were around here, and I learned long ago that when you get this close, you stay put, whether you like it or not.

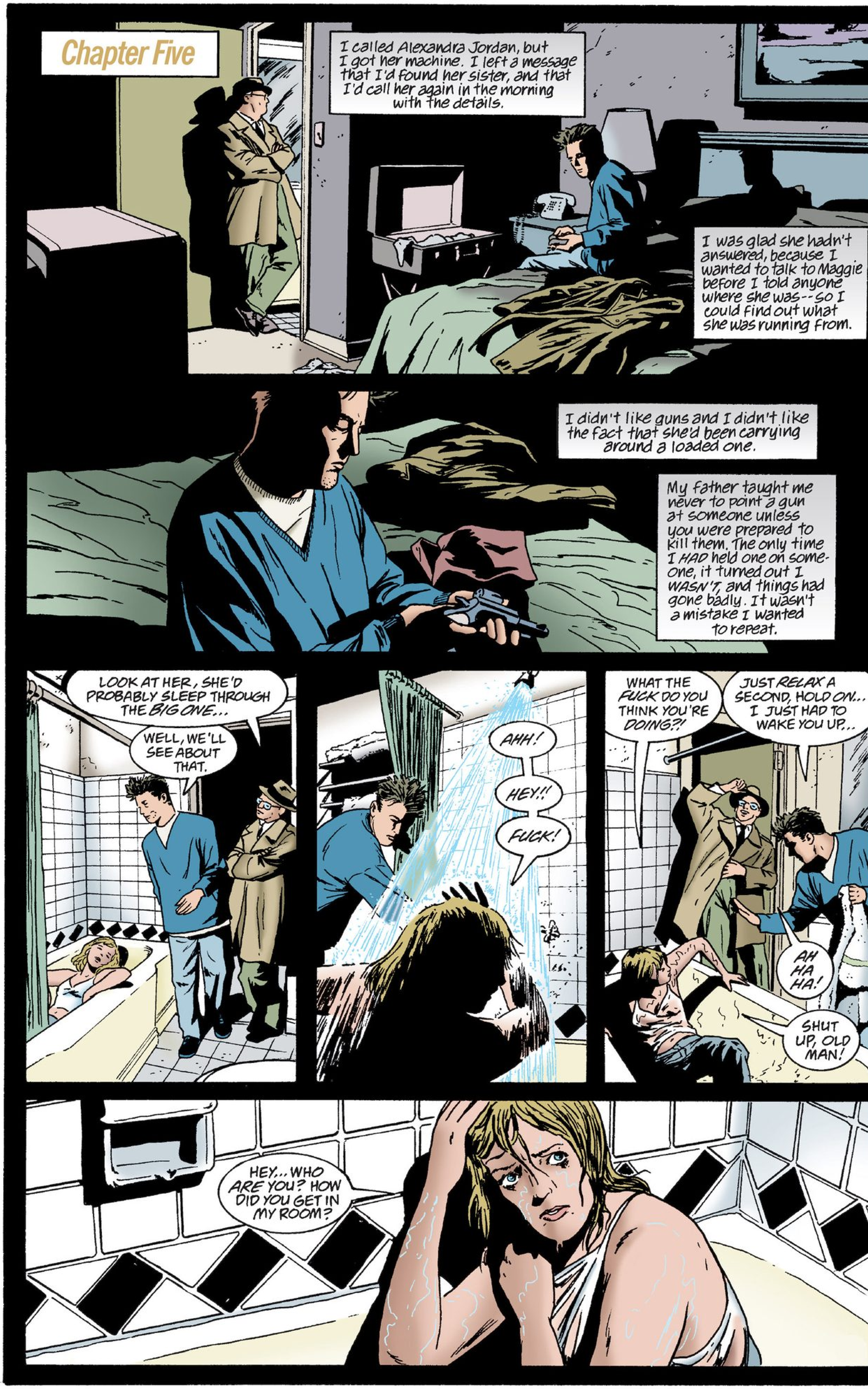

I called and begged Knut to come down. I had no idea how long I'd be staking out this place, but anything longer than a few hours, and you really want someone else there.
You hate to lose a trail just because you ran to piss in the bushes.
SORRY I TOOK SO LONG, KIDDO, MOLLY LOADED ME DOWN...
THANK GOD SHE *DID*.
ALL QUIET SO FAR?
YEAH... BUT THE DESK CLERK CLAIMS SHE COMES BACK WASTED EVERY NIGHT... SO SHE COULD SHOW ANYTIME...
THIS'S HER, HUH? WELL, THIS'S MORE *LIKE* IT. I'M SICK OF WAITIN' AROUND ALL NIGHT JUST TO SERVE A SUBPOENA TO SOME TRUCKER...
YEAH, I'M REAL *FOND* OF THOSE JOBS MYSELF...
ANYTHING?
NAH.
At midnight, after complaining about how boring this had turned out to be, in spite of the fact that we were waiting for an *attractive* girl, Knut dozed off.
...HUNNR... HUNNNRK...
He came along on stakeouts with me because he used to do the same with my father. It was like a family tradition.
He never talked about it, but I was sure he missed my dad a lot.

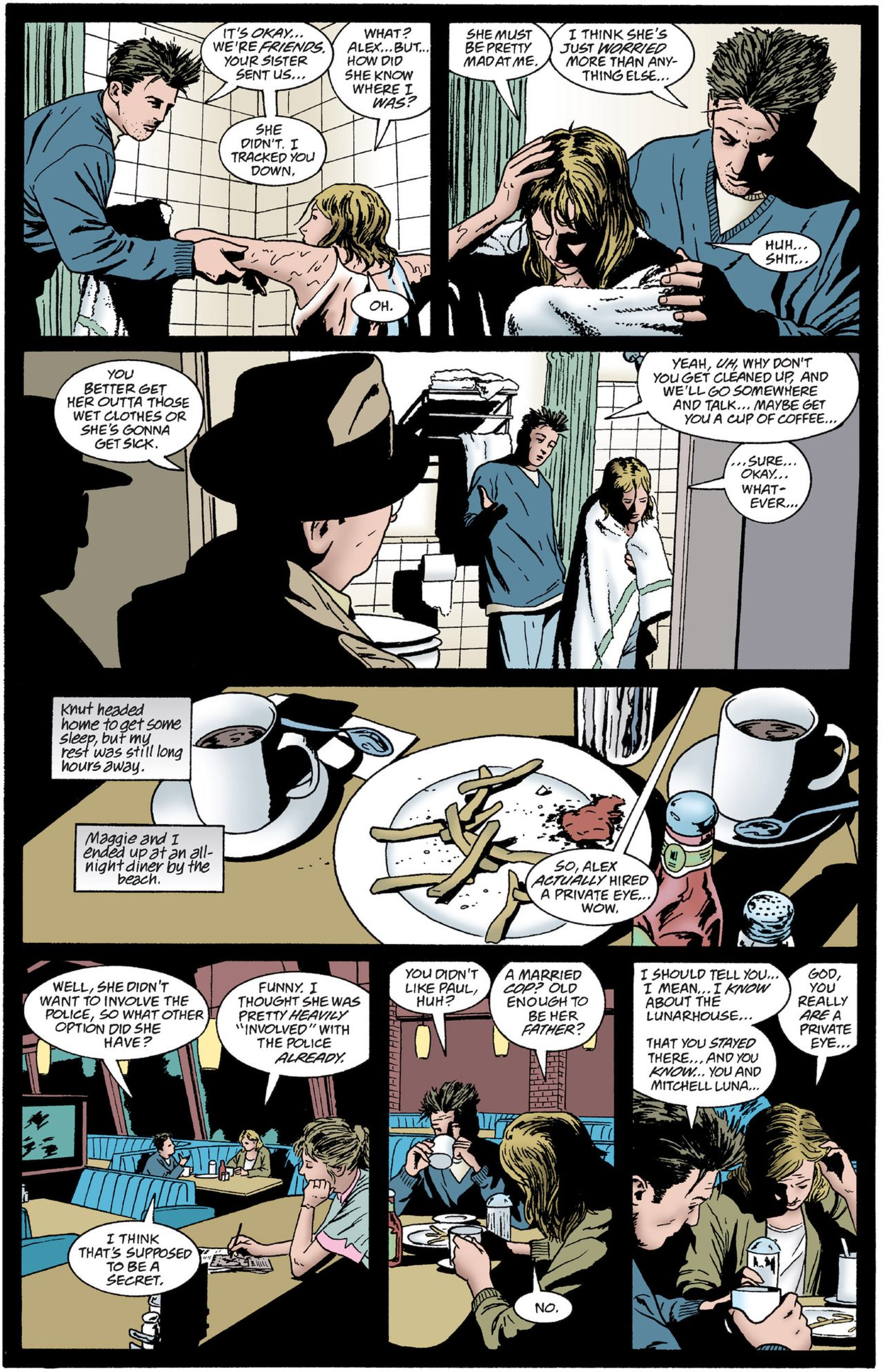

...HUNNR... HUNNNRK...
Finally, there was some activity...

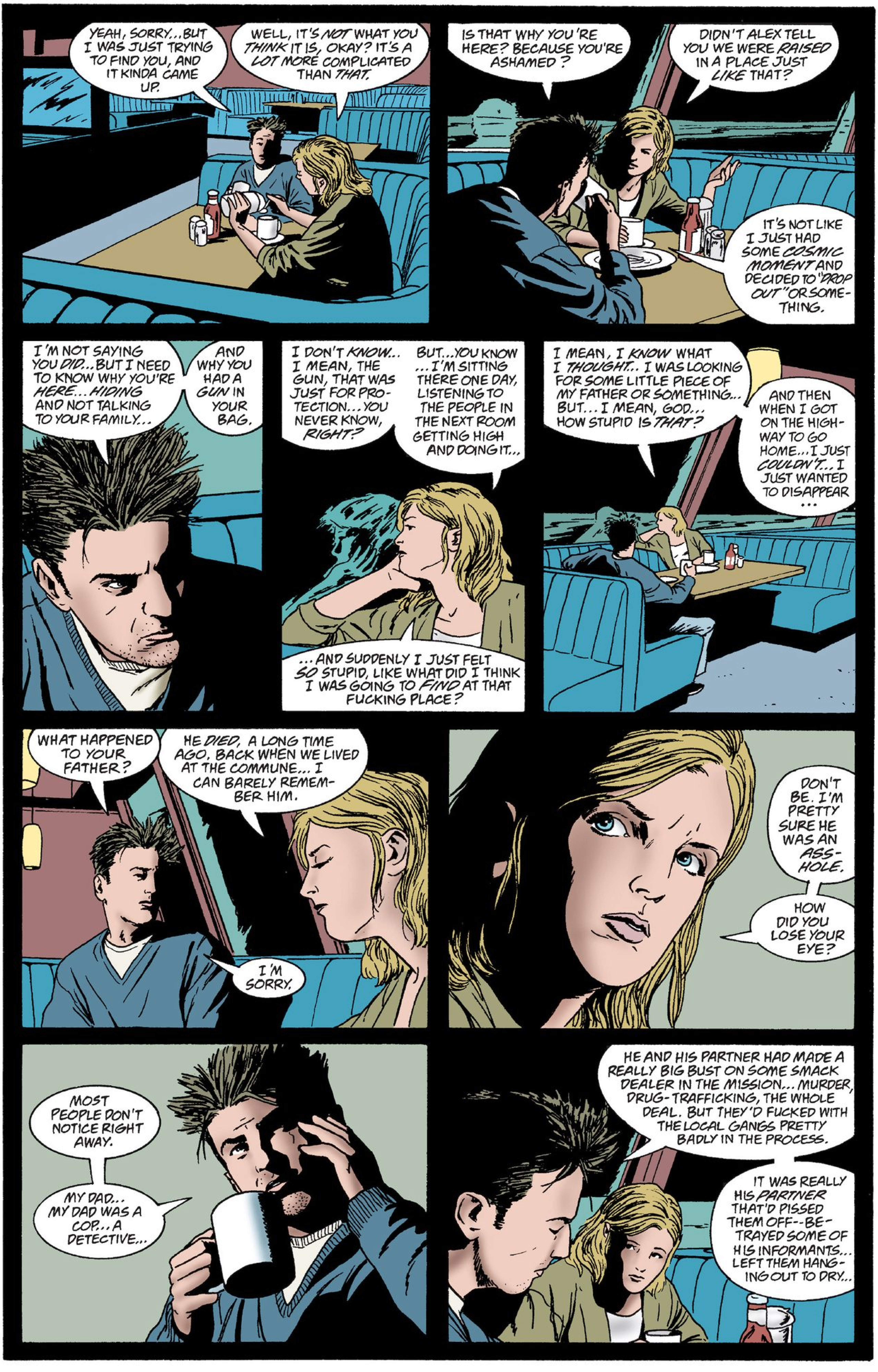

It was Maggie, but, unfortunately, she wasn't alone. And she was obviously really drunk, just as the desk clerk had promised.
8
So drunk she couldn't even make it through the door.
8
I bolted without even thinking about it...
HEY!
HEY, MOTHERFUCKER! HEY!!
OOFFF!
KISS ARMY

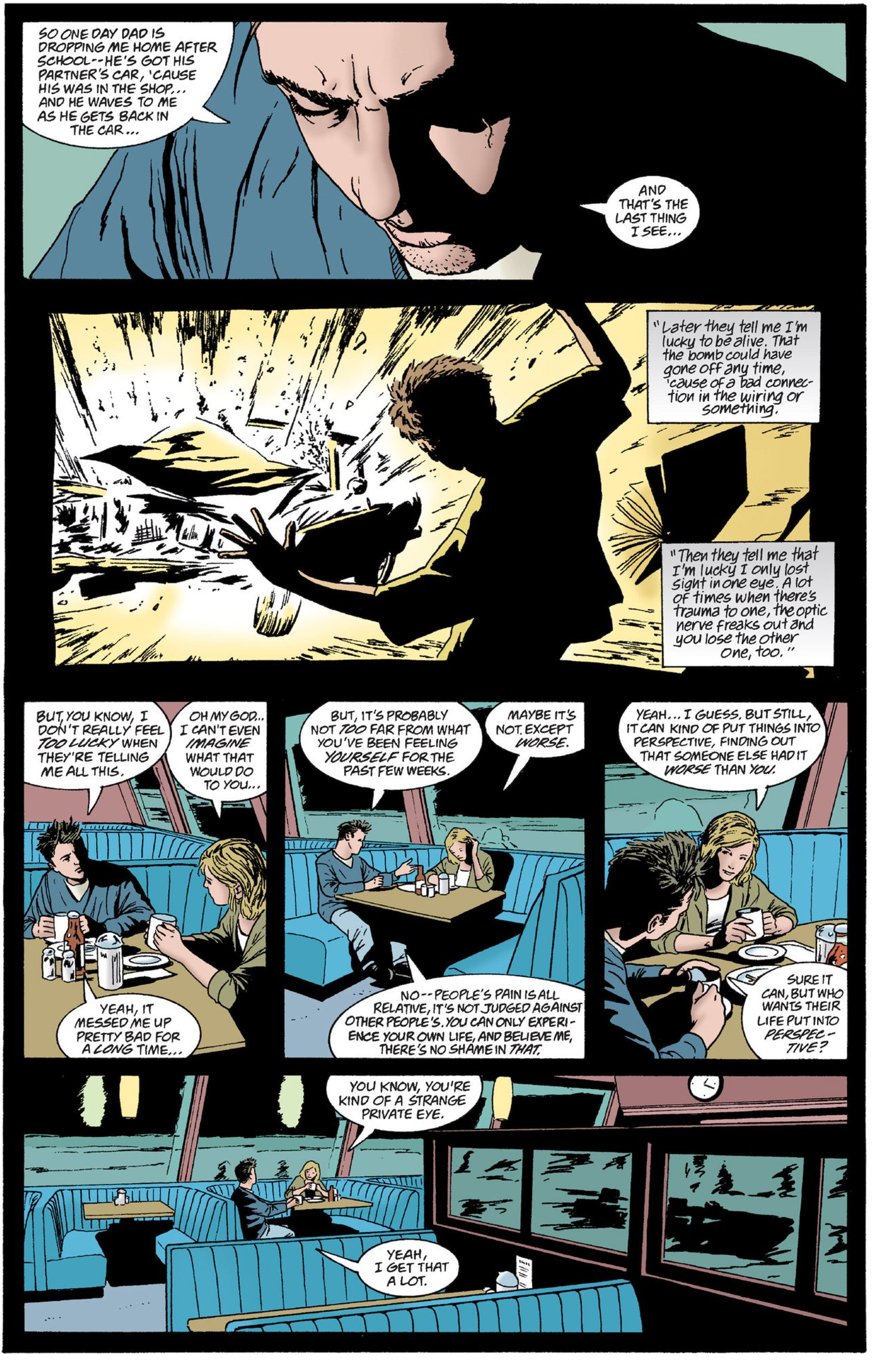

HEY!! GET THE HELL *AWAY* FROM HIM!!
WHAT TH' *FUCK*??
YOU *BETTER* RUN!! BASTARD!
WHAT THE HELL'S GOIN' *ON*? YOU GONNA LET THAT GUY TAKE YOU?
NAH, I WAS JUST GETTIN' WARMED UP...
I was no Fighter -- I'd been in enough of them, and I *usually* got in a lucky shot or two -- but it was still embarrassing to get saved by a 68-year-old man.
WARMED UP, *HELL*. HE WAS ABOUT TO EAT YOUR BALLS FOR BREAKFAST. WHAT YOU NEED IS A *GUN*, OR A BLACKJACK AT *LEAST*...
SO YOU COULD *REALLY* SAP SOME-ONE...
NOW WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM? YOU LOSE A *TOOTH*?
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS...
WHAT, SLEEPING BEAUTY?
NO... WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF *THIS*?

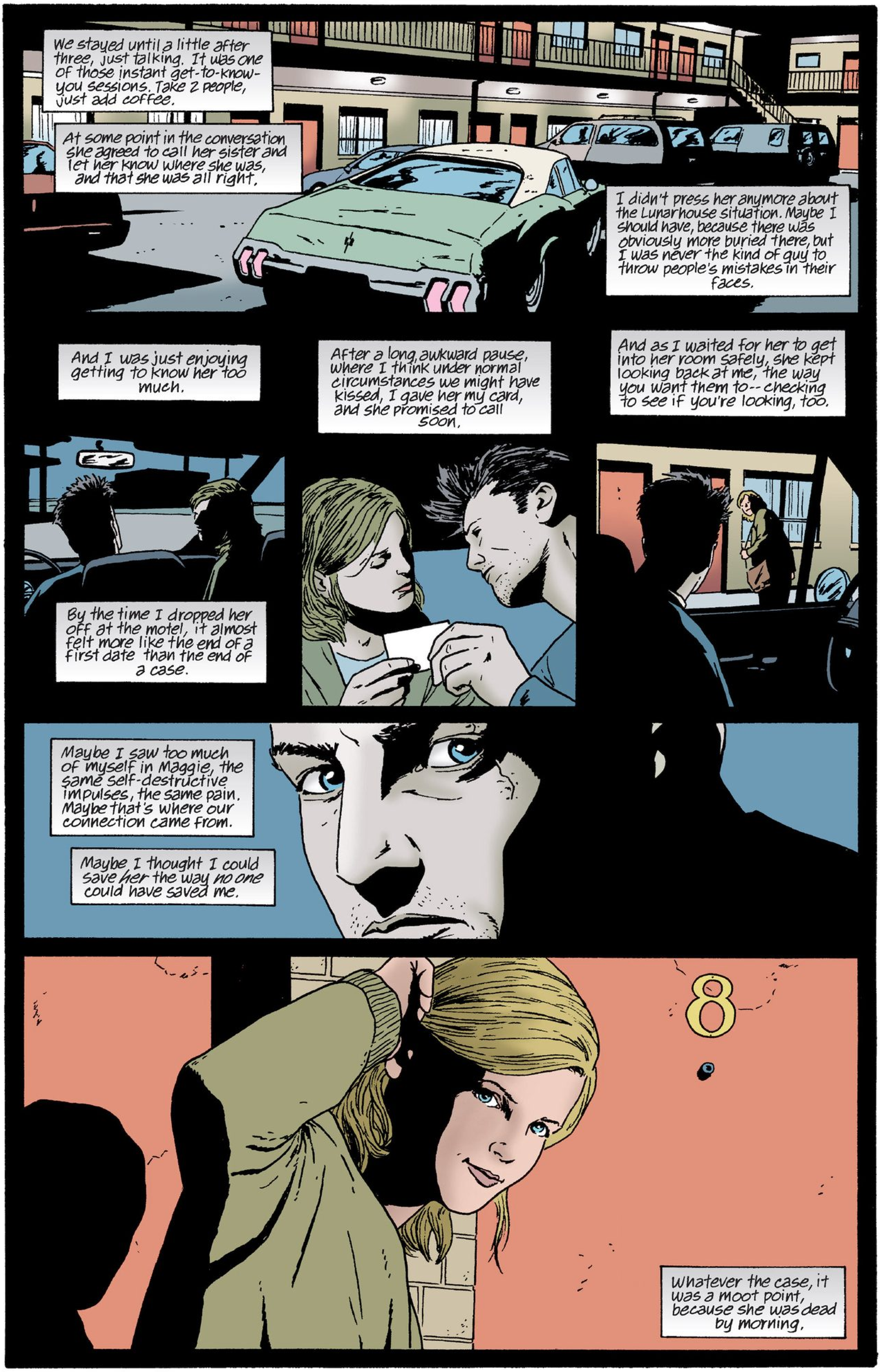
Chapter Five


I called Alexandra Jordan, but I got her machine. I left a message that I'd found her sister, and that I'd call her again in the morning with the details.
I was glad she hadn't answered, because I wanted to talk to Maggie before I told anyone where she was--so I could find out what she was running from.
I didn't like guns and I didn't like the fact that she'd been carrying around a loaded one.
My father taught me never to point a gun at someone unless you were prepared to kill them. The only time I *HAD* held one on someone, it turned out I *WASN'T*, and things had gone badly. It wasn't a mistake I wanted to repeat.
LOOK AT HER, SHE'D PROBABLY SLEEP THROUGH THE *BIG ONE*...
WELL, WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT.
AHH!
HEY!!
FUCK!
WHAT THE *FUCK* DO YOU THINK YOU'RE *DOING?!*
JUST *RELAX* A SECOND, HOLD ON... I JUST HAD TO WAKE YOU UP...
AH HA HA!
SHUT UP, OLD MAN!
HEY... WHO *ARE YOU?* HOW DID YOU GET IN MY ROOM?

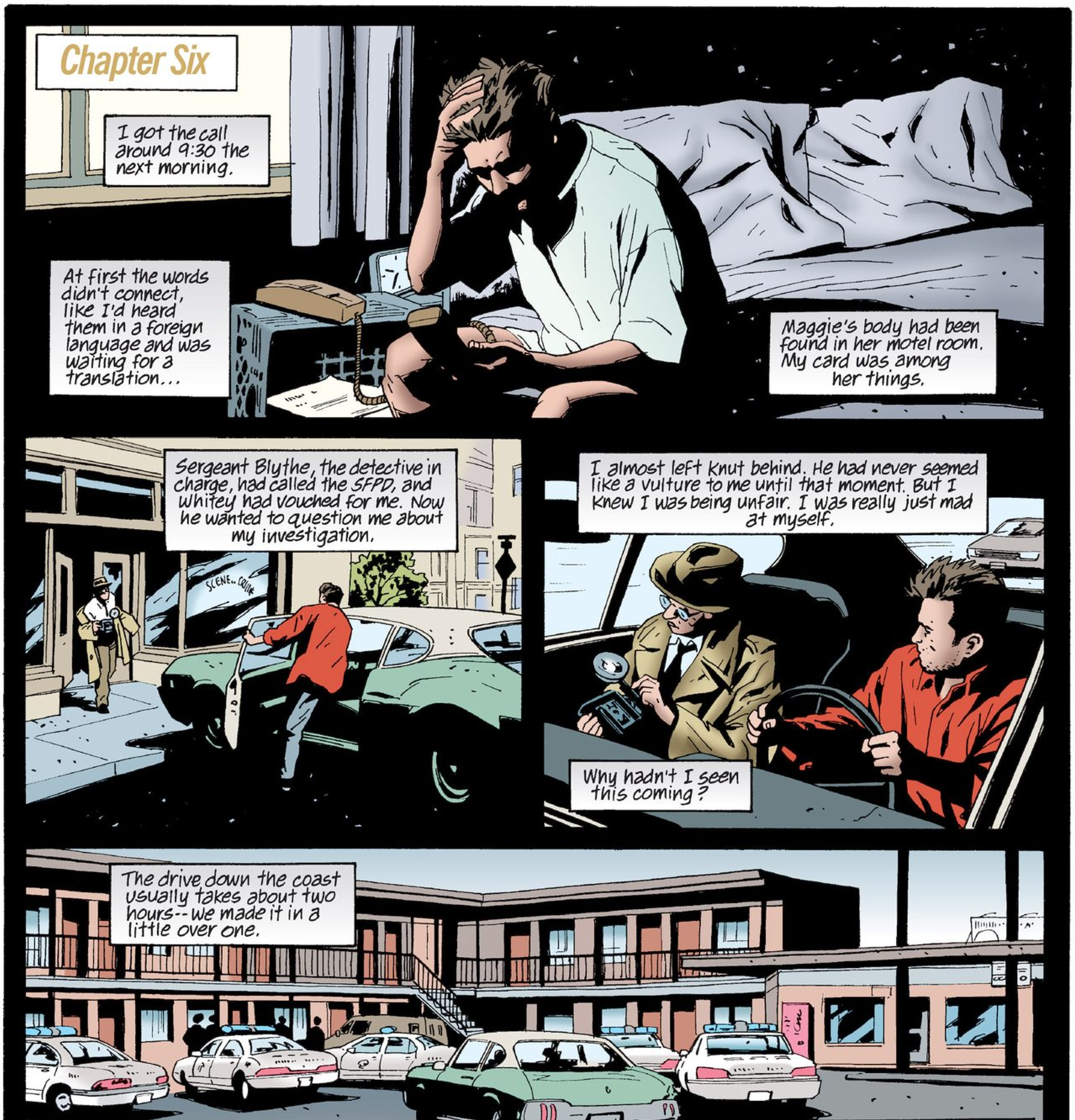

IT'S *OKAY*... WE'RE *FRIENDS.* YOUR SISTER SENT US...
WHAT? ALEX... BUT... HOW DID SHE KNOW WHERE I *WAS?*
SHE DIDN'T. I TRACKED YOU DOWN.
OH.
SHE MUST BE PRETTY MAD AT ME.
I THINK SHE'S JUST *WORRIED* MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE...
HUH... SHIT...
YOU BETTER GET HER OUTTA THOSE WET CLOTHES OR SHE'S GONNA GET SICK.
YEAH, *UH,* WHY DON'T YOU GET CLEANED UP, AND WE'LL GO SOMEWHERE AND TALK... MAYBE GET YOU A CUP OF COFFEE...
...SURE... OKAY... WHATEVER...
Knut headed home to get some sleep, but my rest was still long hours away.
Maggie and I ended up at an all-night diner by the beach.
SO, ALEX *ACTUALLY* HIRED A PRIVATE EYE... WOW.
WELL, SHE DIDN'T WANT TO INVOLVE THE POLICE, SO WHAT OTHER OPTION DID SHE HAVE?
FUNNY. I THOUGHT SHE WAS PRETTY *HEAVILY* "INVOLVED" WITH THE POLICE *ALREADY.*
I THINK THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET.
YOU DIDN'T LIKE PAUL, HUH?
A MARRIED *COP?* OLD ENOUGH TO BE HER *FATHER?*
NO.
I SHOULD TELL YOU... I MEAN... I *KNOW* ABOUT THE LUNARHOUSE...
THAT YOU *STAYED* THERE... AND YOU *KNOW*... YOU AND MITCHELL LUNA...
GOD, YOU REALLY *ARE* A PRIVATE EYE...

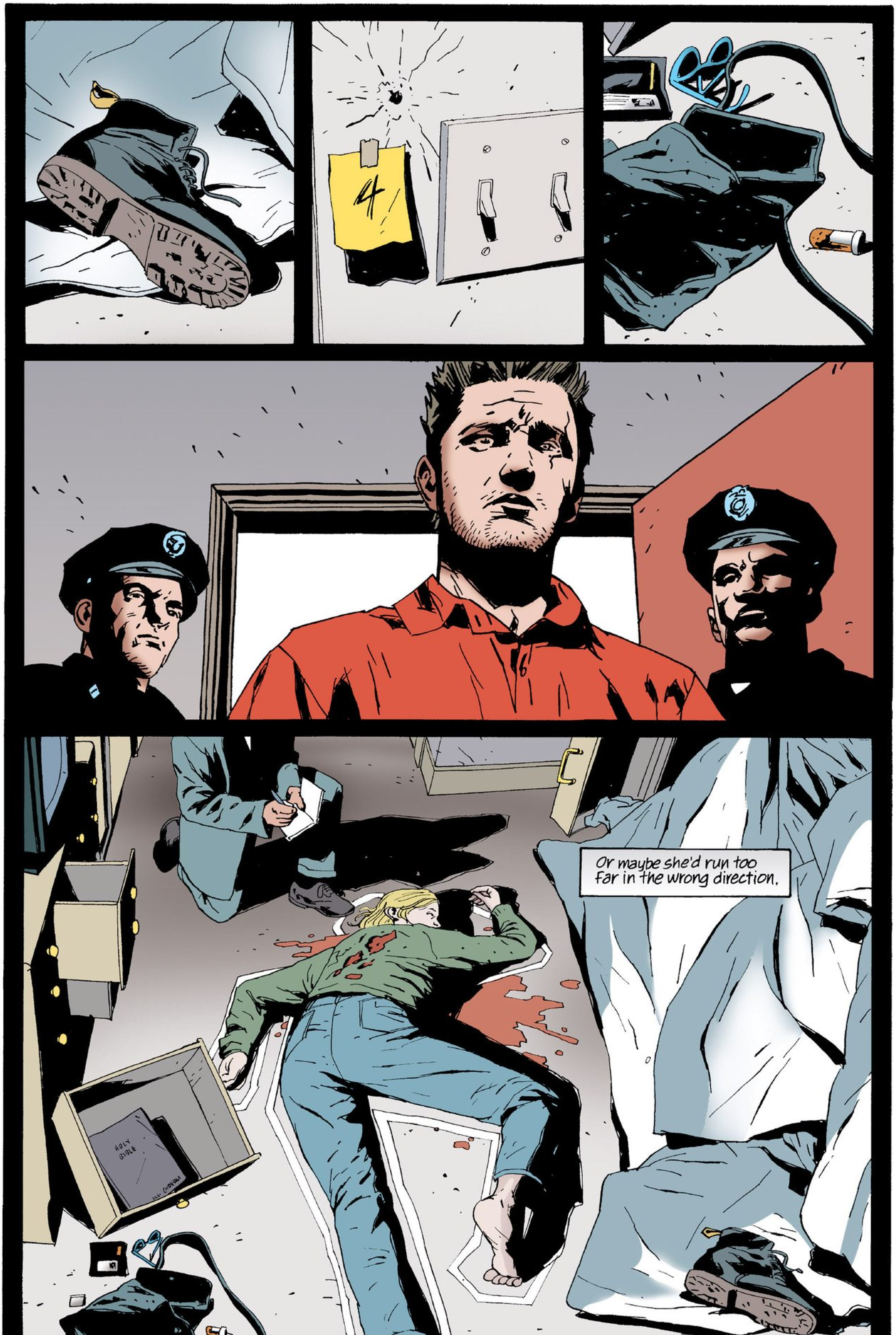

YEAH, SORRY... BUT I WAS JUST TRYING TO FIND YOU, AND IT KINDA CAME UP.
WELL, IT'S *NOT* WHAT YOU *THINK* IT IS, OKAY? IT'S A *LOT* MORE COMPLICATED THAN *THAT.*
IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HERE? BECAUSE YOU'RE ASHAMED?
DIDN'T ALEX TELL YOU WE WERE *RAISED* IN A PLACE JUST *LIKE* THAT?
IT'S NOT LIKE I JUST HAD SOME *COSMIC MOMENT* AND DECIDED TO "*DROP OUT*" OR SOMETHING.
I'M NOT SAYING YOU *DID*... BUT I NEED TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE *HERE*... *HIDING* AND NOT TALKING TO YOUR FAMILY...
AND WHY YOU HAD A *GUN* IN YOUR BAG.
I DON'T *KNOW*... I MEAN, THE GUN, THAT WAS JUST FOR PROTECTION... YOU NEVER KNOW, *RIGHT?*
BUT... YOU KNOW ... I'M SITTING THERE ONE DAY, LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE IN THE NEXT ROOM GETTING HIGH AND DOING IT...
... AND SUDDENLY I JUST FELT *SO* STUPID, LIKE WHAT DID I THINK I WAS GOING TO *FIND* AT THAT FUCKING PLACE?
I MEAN, I *KNOW* WHAT I *THOUGHT*... I WAS LOOKING FOR SOME LITTLE PIECE OF MY FATHER OR SOMETHING... BUT... I MEAN, GOD... HOW STUPID IS *THAT?*
AND THEN WHEN I GOT ON THE HIGHWAY TO GO HOME... I JUST *COULDN'T*... I JUST WANTED TO DISAPPEAR ...
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FATHER?
HE *DIED*, A LONG TIME AGO, BACK WHEN WE LIVED AT THE COMMUNE... I CAN BARELY REMEMBER HIM.
I'M SORRY.
DON'T BE. I'M PRETTY SURE HE WAS AN ASSHOLE.
HOW DID YOU LOSE YOUR EYE?
MOST PEOPLE DON'T NOTICE RIGHT AWAY.
MY DAD... MY DAD WAS A COP... A DETECTIVE...
HE AND HIS PARTNER HAD MADE A REALLY BIG BUST ON SOME SMACK DEALER IN THE MISSION... MURDER, DRUG-TRAFFICKING, THE WHOLE DEAL. BUT THEY'D FUCKED WITH THE LOCAL GANGS PRETTY BADLY IN THE PROCESS.
IT WAS REALLY HIS *PARTNER* THAT'D PISSED THEM OFF--BETRAYED SOME OF HIS INFORMANTS... LEFT THEM HANGING OUT TO DRY...

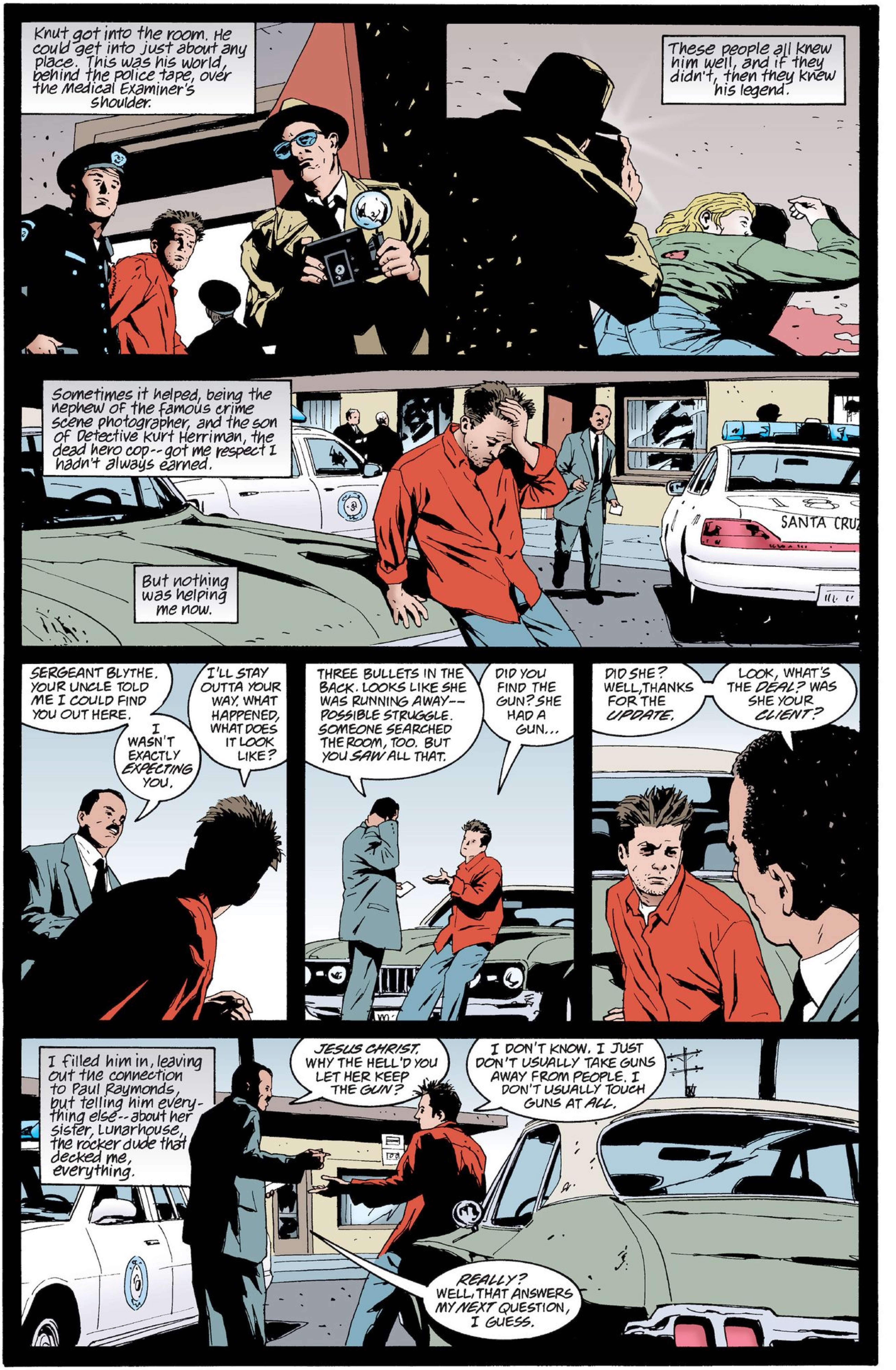

SO ONE DAY DAD IS DROPPING ME HOME AFTER SCHOOL--HE'S GOT HIS PARTNER'S CAR, 'CAUSE HIS WAS IN THE SHOP... AND HE WAVES TO ME AS HE GETS BACK IN THE CAR...
AND THAT'S THE LAST THING I SEE...
"Later they tell me I'm lucky to be alive. That the bomb could have gone off any time, 'cause of a bad connection in the wiring or something.
"Then they tell me that I'm lucky I only lost sight in one eye. A lot of times when there's trauma to one, the optic nerve freaks out and you lose the other one, too."
BUT, YOU KNOW, I DON'T REALLY FEEL *TOO LUCKY* WHEN THEY'RE TELLING ME ALL THIS.
OH MY GOD... I CAN'T EVEN *IMAGINE* WHAT THAT WOULD DO TO YOU...
YEAH, IT MESSED ME UP PRETTY BAD FOR A *LONG* TIME...
BUT, IT'S PROBABLY NOT *TOO* FAR FROM WHAT YOU'VE BEEN FEELING *YOURSELF* FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS.
MAYBE IT'S NOT. EXCEPT *WORSE*.
NO--PEOPLE'S PAIN IS ALL RELATIVE, IT'S NOT JUDGED AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE'S. YOU CAN ONLY EXPERIENCE YOUR OWN LIFE, AND BELIEVE ME, THERE'S NO SHAME IN *THAT*.
YEAH... I GUESS. BUT STILL, IT CAN KIND OF PUT THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE, FINDING OUT THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAD IT *WORSE* THAN *YOU*.
SURE IT CAN, BUT WHO WANTS THEIR LIFE PUT INTO *PERSPECTIVE*?
YOU KNOW, YOU'RE KIND OF A STRANGE PRIVATE EYE.
YEAH, I GET THAT A LOT.

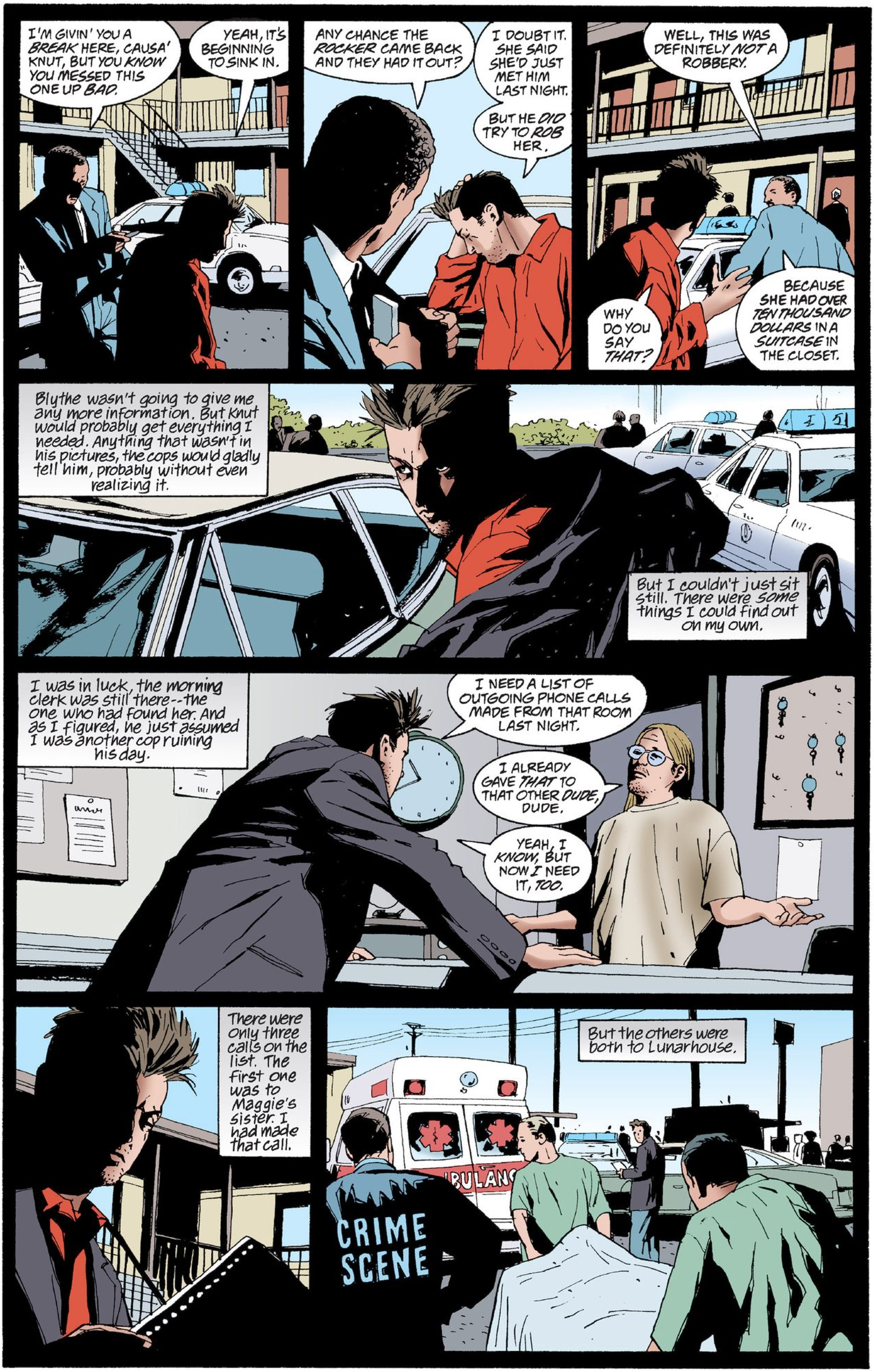

We stayed until a little after three, just talking. It was one of those instant get-to-know-you sessions. Take 2 people, just add coffee.
At some point in the conversation she agreed to call her sister and let her know where she was, and that she was all right.
I didn't press her anymore about the Lunarhouse situation. Maybe I should have, because there was obviously more buried there, but I was never the kind of guy to throw people's mistakes in their faces.
And I was just enjoying getting to know her too much.
By the time I dropped her off at the motel, it almost felt more like the end of a first date than the end of a case.
After a long, awkward pause, where I think under normal circumstances we might have kissed, I gave her my card, and she promised to call soon.
And as I waited for her to get into her room safely, she kept looking back at me, the way you want them to-- checking to see if you're looking, too.
Maybe I saw too much of myself in Maggie, the same self-destructive impulses, the same pain. Maybe that's where our connection came from.
Maybe I thought I could save *her* the way no one could have saved me.
8
Whatever the case, it was a moot point, because she was dead by morning.

Chapter Six

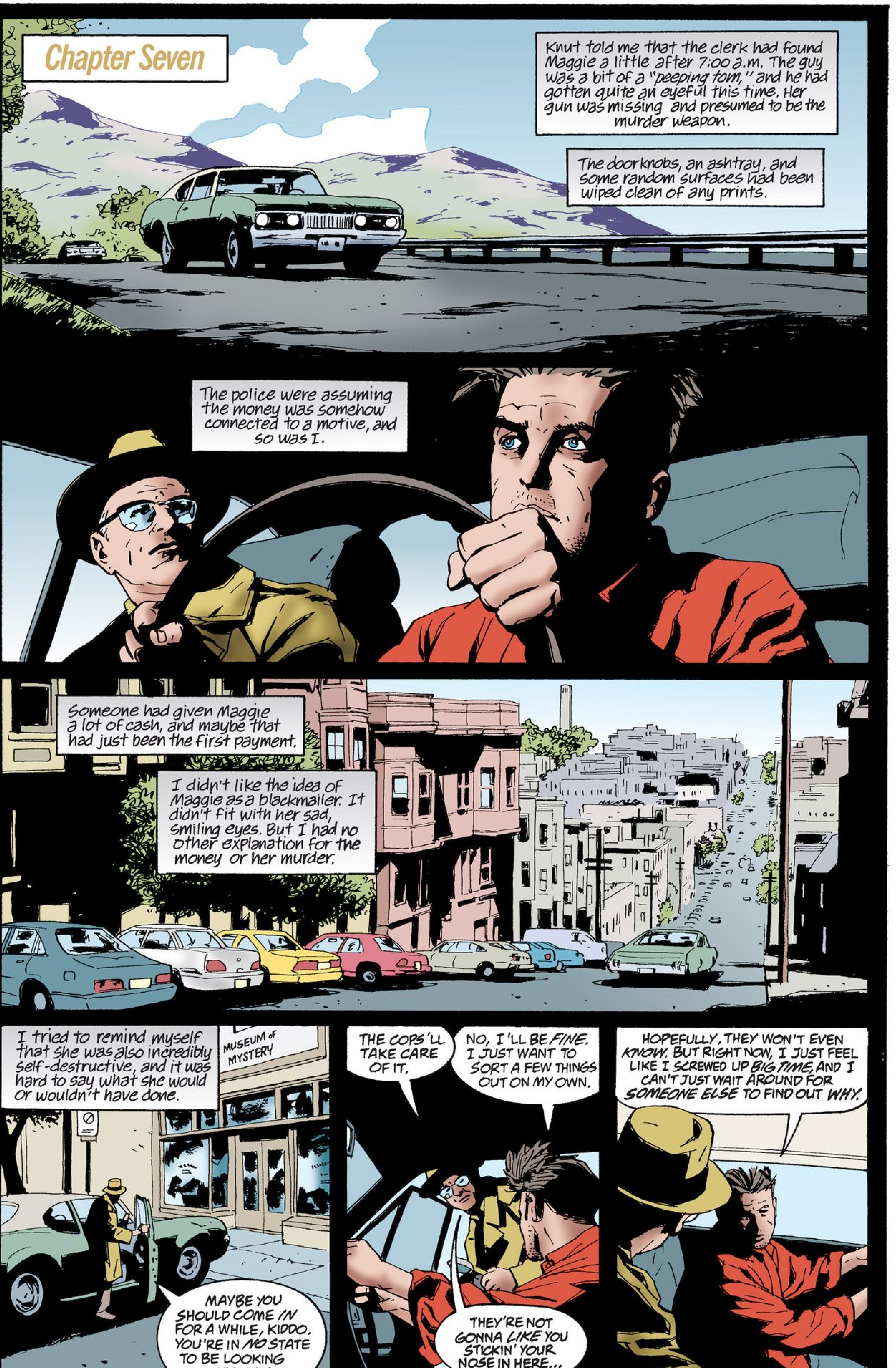

I got the call around 9:30 the next morning.
At first the words didn't connect, like I'd heard them in a foreign language and was waiting for a translation...
Maggie's body had been found in her motel room. My card was among her things.
Sergeant Blythe, the detective in charge, had called the SFPD, and Whitey had vouched for me. Now he wanted to question me about my investigation.
SCENE.. CRIME
I almost left Knut behind. He had never seemed like a vulture to me until that moment. But I knew I was being unfair. I was really just mad at myself.
Why hadn't I seen this coming?
The drive down the coast usually takes about two hours--we made it in a little over one.
Blythe had asked me to come down to his office later that day. He probably didn't want a Private Investigator at his crime scene, but the hell with him.
It felt so wrong. This hadn't been a dangerous case. Maggie was just a confused kid running from her past mistakes.
But maybe her mistakes were bigger than I had figured.
C'MON, ASSHOLE! MOVE AWAY!

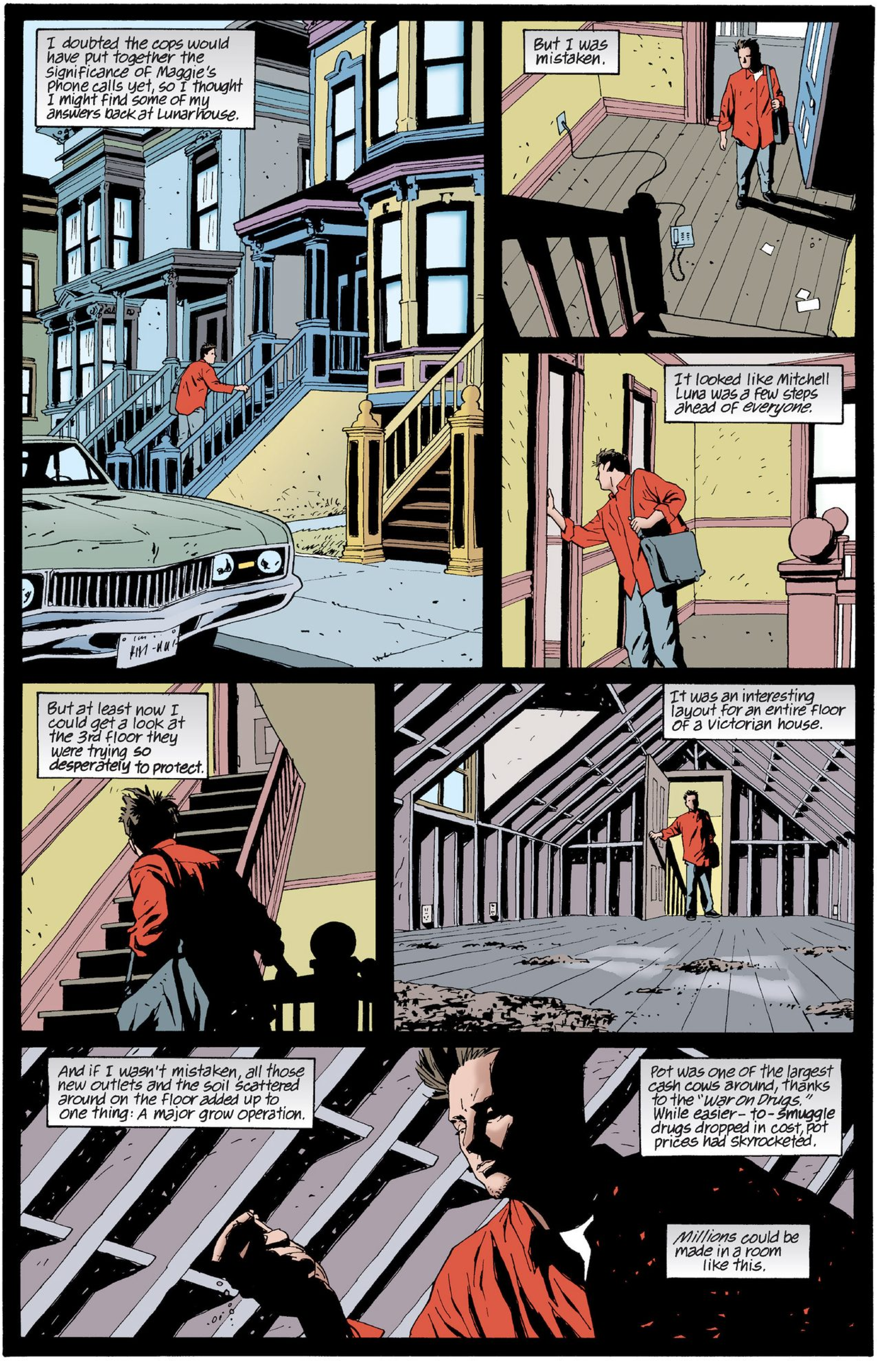

4
Or maybe she'd run too far in the wrong direction.
HOLY BIBLE

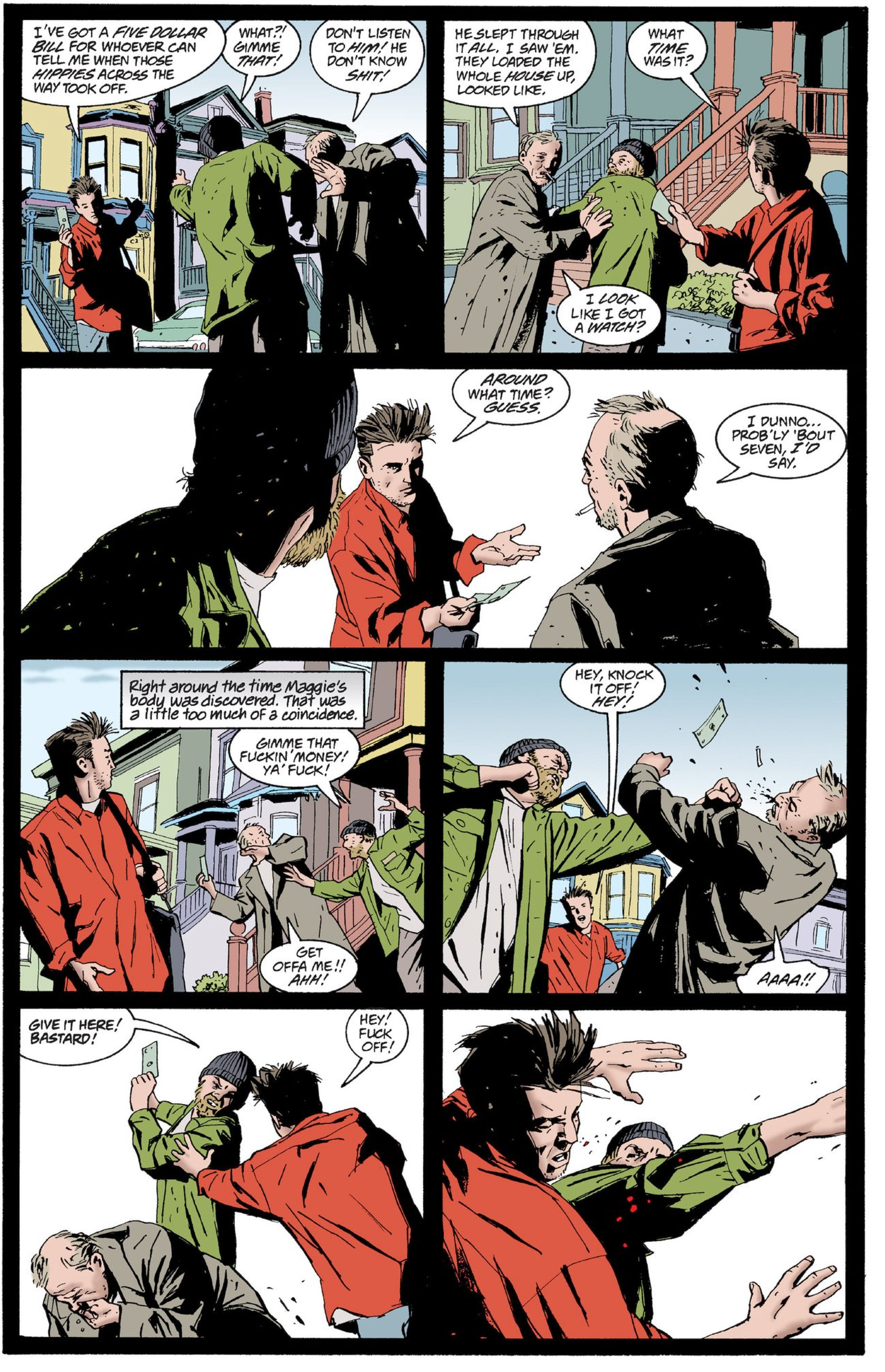

Knut got into the room. He could get into just about any place. This was his world, behind the police tape, over the Medical Examiner's shoulder.
These people all knew him well, and if they didn't, then they knew his legend.
Sometimes it helped, being the nephew of the famous crime scene photographer, and the son of Detective Kurt Herriman, the dead hero cop--got me respect I hadn't always earned.
SANTA CRUZ
But nothing was helping me now.
SERGEANT BLYTHE. YOUR UNCLE TOLD ME I COULD FIND YOU OUT HERE.
I WASN'T EXACTLY *EXPECTING* YOU.
I'LL STAY OUTTA YOUR WAY. WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?
THREE BULLETS IN THE BACK. LOOKS LIKE SHE WAS RUNNING AWAY--POSSIBLE STRUGGLE. SOMEONE SEARCHED THE ROOM, TOO. BUT YOU *SAW* ALL THAT.
DID YOU FIND THE GUN? SHE HAD A GUN...
DID SHE? WELL, THANKS FOR THE *UPDATE*.
LOOK, WHAT'S THE *DEAL*? WAS SHE YOUR *CLIENT*?
I filled him in, leaving out the connection to Paul Raymonds, but telling him everything else--about her sister, Lunarhouse, the rocker dude that decked me, everything.
JESUS CHRIST. WHY THE HELL'D YOU LET HER KEEP THE *GUN*?
I DON'T KNOW. I JUST DON'T USUALLY TAKE GUNS AWAY FROM PEOPLE. I DON'T USUALLY TOUCH GUNS AT *ALL*.
REALLY? WELL, THAT ANSWERS MY *NEXT* QUESTION, I GUESS.

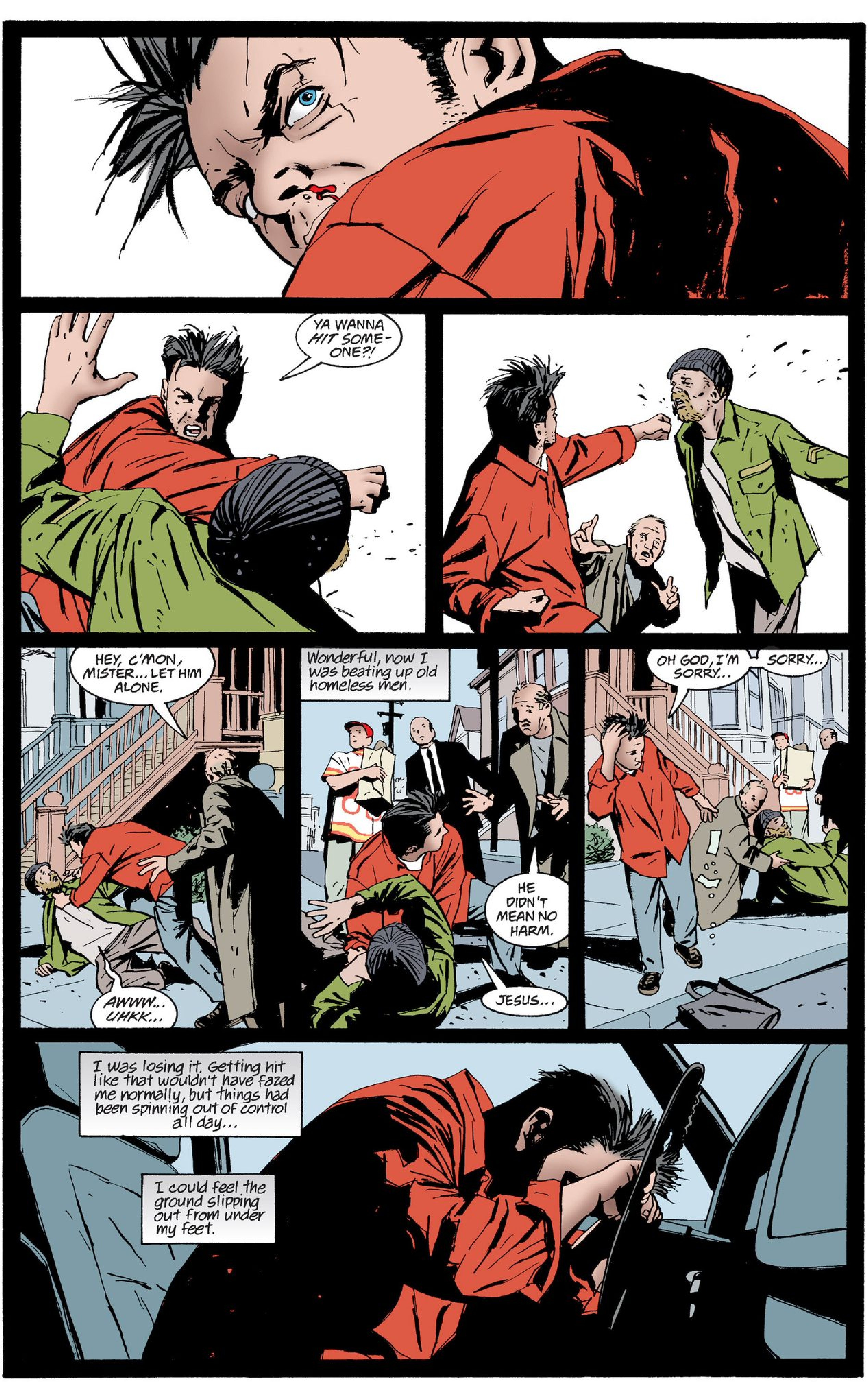

I'M GIVIN' YOU A *BREAK* HERE, CAUSA' KNUT, BUT YOU *KNOW* YOU MESSED THIS ONE UP *BAD*.
YEAH, IT'S BEGINNING TO SINK IN.
ANY CHANCE THE *ROCKER* CAME BACK AND THEY HAD IT OUT?
I DOUBT IT. SHE SAID SHE'D JUST MET HIM LAST NIGHT.
BUT HE *DID* TRY TO *ROB* HER.
WELL, THIS WAS DEFINITELY *NOT* A ROBBERY.
WHY DO YOU SAY *THAT*?
BECAUSE SHE HAD OVER *TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS* IN A *SUITCASE* IN THE CLOSET.
Blythe wasn't going to give me any more information. But Knut would probably get everything I needed. Anything that wasn't in his pictures, the cops would gladly tell him, probably without even realizing it.
But I couldn't just sit still. There were *some* things I could find out on my own.
I was in luck, the morning clerk was still there--the one who had found her. And as I figured, he just assumed I was another cop ruining his day.
I NEED A LIST OF OUTGOING PHONE CALLS MADE FROM THAT ROOM LAST NIGHT.
I ALREADY GAVE *THAT* TO THAT OTHER *DUDE*, DUDE.
YEAH, I *KNOW*, BUT NOW *I* NEED IT, *TOO*.
There were only three calls on the list. The first one was to Maggie's sister. I had made that call.
But the others were both to Lunarhouse.
AMBULANCE
CRIME SCENE

Chapter Seven

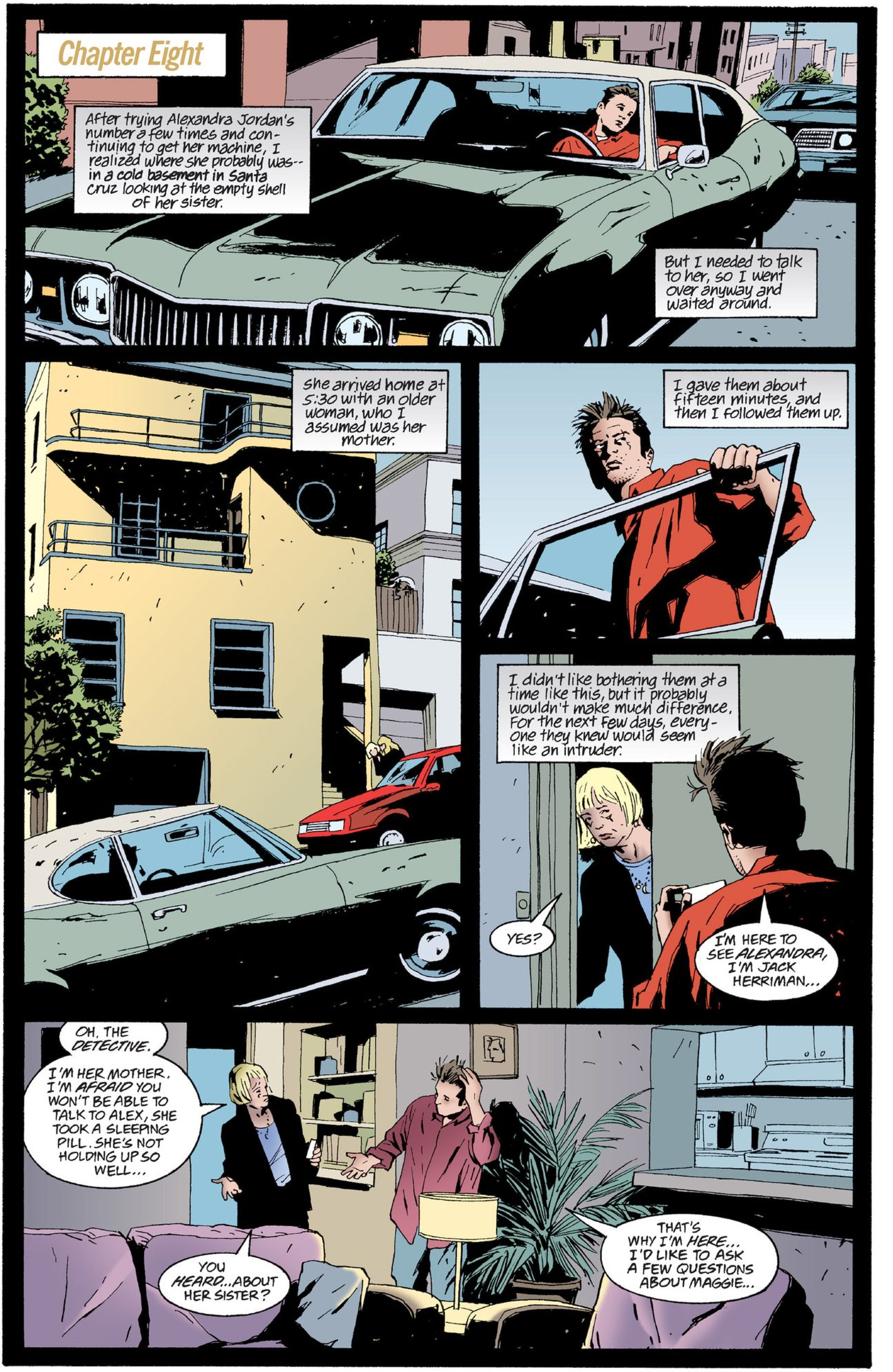

Knut told me that the clerk had found Maggie a little after 7:00 a.m. The guy was a bit of a "peeping tom," and he had gotten quite an eyeful this time. Her gun was missing and presumed to be the murder weapon.
The doorknobs, an ashtray, and some random surfaces had been wiped clean of any prints.
The police were assuming the money was somehow connected to a motive, and so was I.
Someone had given Maggie a lot of cash, and maybe that had just been the first payment.
I didn't like the idea of Maggie as a blackmailer. It didn't fit with her sad, smiling eyes. But I had no other explanation for the money or her murder.
I tried to remind myself that she was also incredibly self-destructive, and it was hard to say what she would or wouldn't have done.
MUSEUM of MYSTERY
MAYBE YOU SHOULD COME IN FOR A WHILE, KIDDO. YOU'RE IN NO STATE TO BE LOOKING INTO THIS.
THE COPS'LL TAKE CARE OF IT.
NO, I'LL BE FINE. I JUST WANT TO SORT A FEW THINGS OUT ON MY OWN.
THEY'RE NOT GONNA LIKE YOU STICKIN' YOUR NOSE IN HERE...
HOPEFULLY, THEY WON'T EVEN KNOW. BUT RIGHT NOW, I JUST FEEL LIKE I SCREWED UP BIG TIME, AND I CAN'T JUST WAIT AROUND FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO FIND OUT WHY.

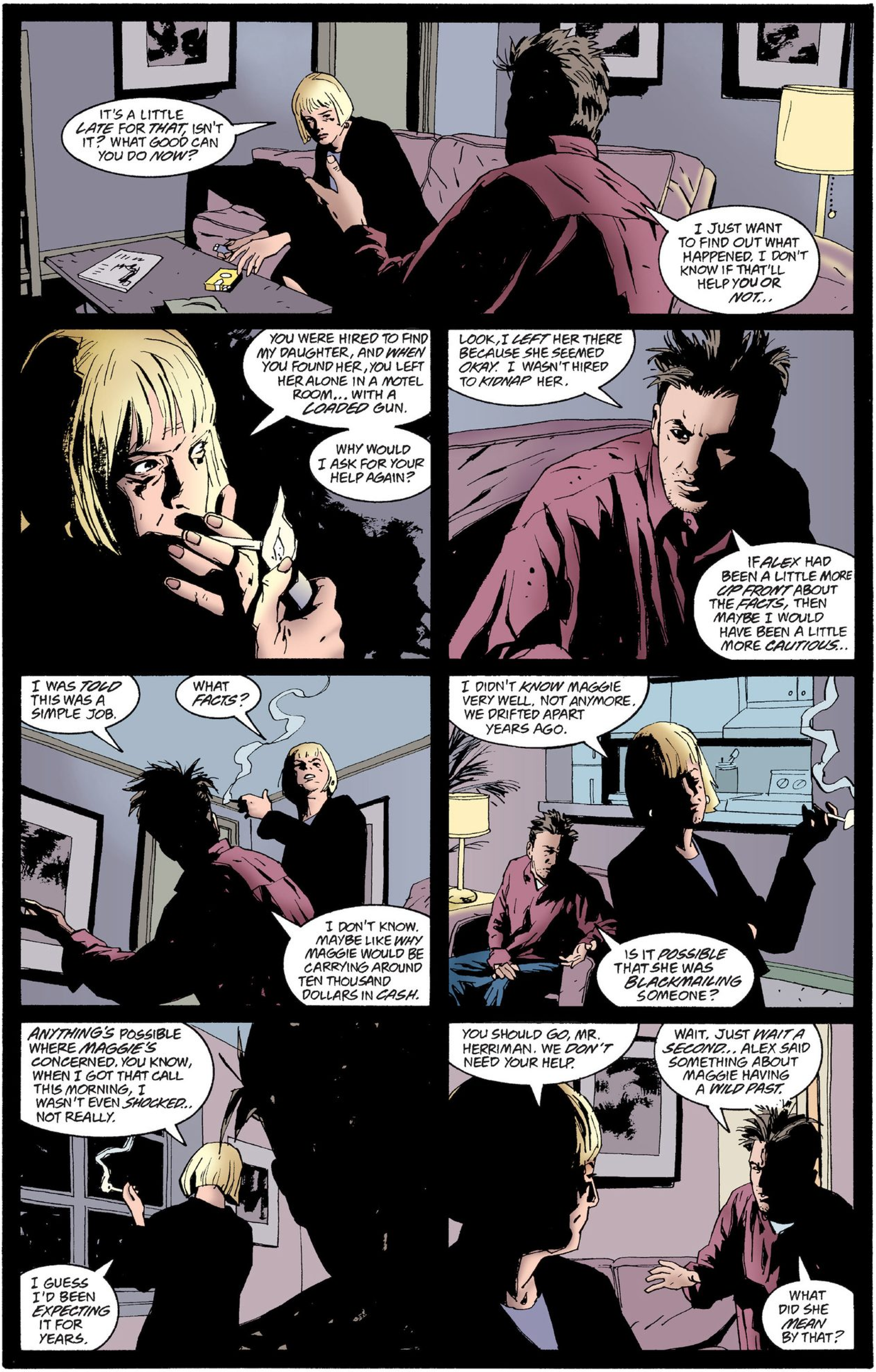

I doubted the cops would have put together the significance of Maggie's phone calls yet, so I thought I might find some of my answers back at Lunarhouse.
But I was mistaken.
It looked like Mitchell Luna was a few steps ahead of everyone.
But at least now I could get a look at the 3rd floor they were trying so desperately to protect.
It was an interesting layout for an entire floor of a Victorian house.
And if I wasn't mistaken, all those new outlets and the soil scattered around on the floor added up to one thing: A major grow operation.
Pot was one of the largest cash cows around, thanks to the "War on Drugs." While easier-to-smuggle drugs dropped in cost, pot prices had skyrocketed.
Millions could be made in a room like this.

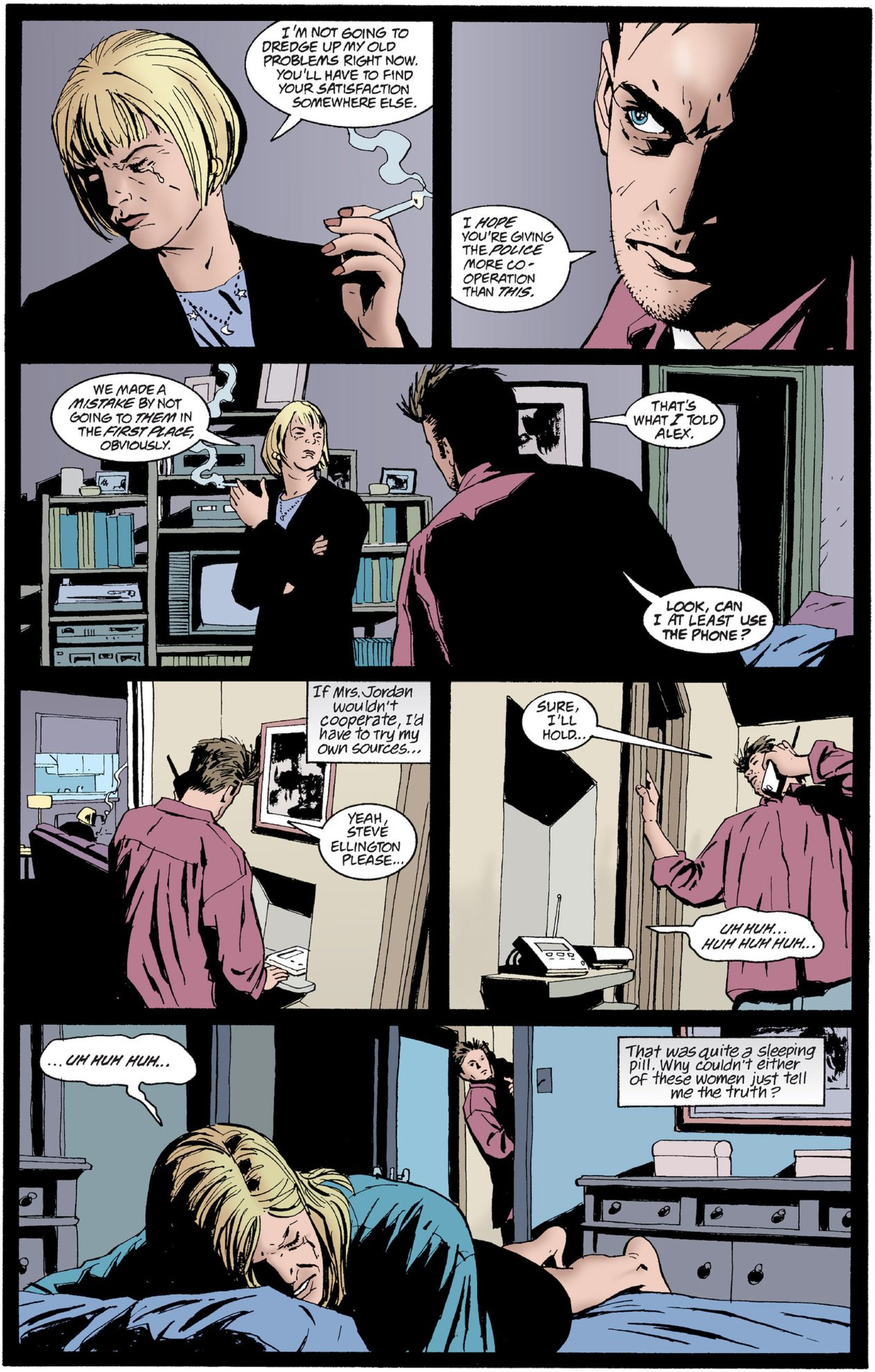

I'VE GOT A FIVE DOLLAR BILL FOR WHOEVER CAN TELL ME WHEN THOSE HIPPIES ACROSS THE WAY TOOK OFF.
WHAT?! GIMME THAT!
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM! HE DON'T KNOW SHIT!
HE SLEPT THROUGH IT ALL. I SAW 'EM. THEY LOADED THE WHOLE HOUSE UP, LOOKED LIKE.
WHAT TIME WAS IT?
I LOOK LIKE I GOT A WATCH?
AROUND WHAT TIME? GUESS.
I DUNNO... PROB'LY 'BOUT SEVEN, I'D SAY.
Right around the time Maggie's body was discovered. That was a little too much of a coincidence.
GIMME THAT FUCKIN' MONEY! YA' FUCK!
GET OFFA ME!! AHH!
HEY, KNOCK IT OFF! HEY!
AAAA!!
GIVE IT HERE! BASTARD!
HEY! FUCK OFF!

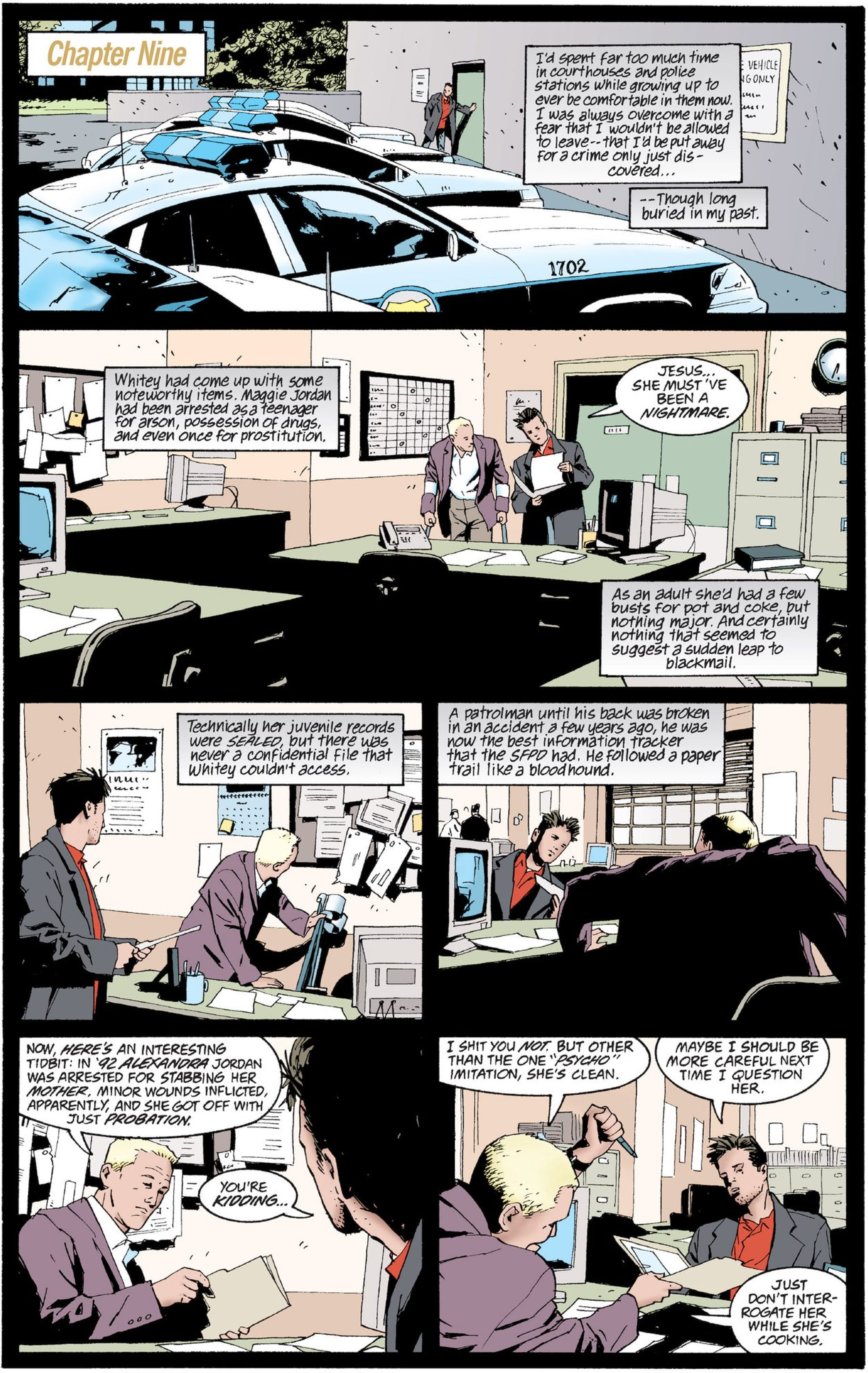

YA WANNA HIT SOME-ONE?!
HEY, C'MON, MISTER... LET HIM ALONE.
AWWW... UHKK...
Wonderful, now I was beating up old homeless men.
HE DIDN'T MEAN NO HARM.
JESUS...
OH GOD, I'M SORRY...
SORRY...
I was losing it. Getting hit like that wouldn't have fazed me normally, but things had been spinning out of control all day...
I could feel the ground slipping out from under my feet.

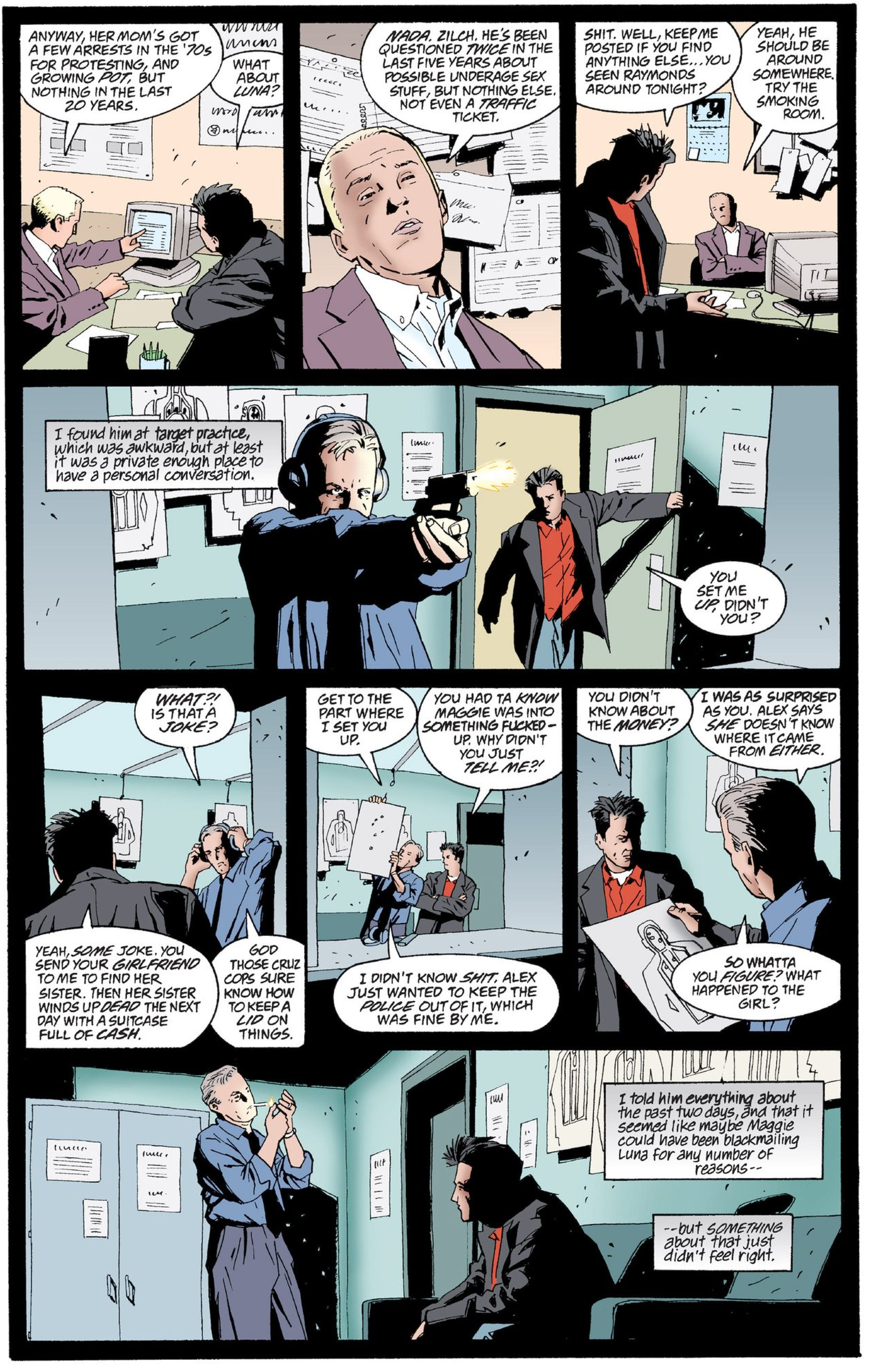
Chapter Eight

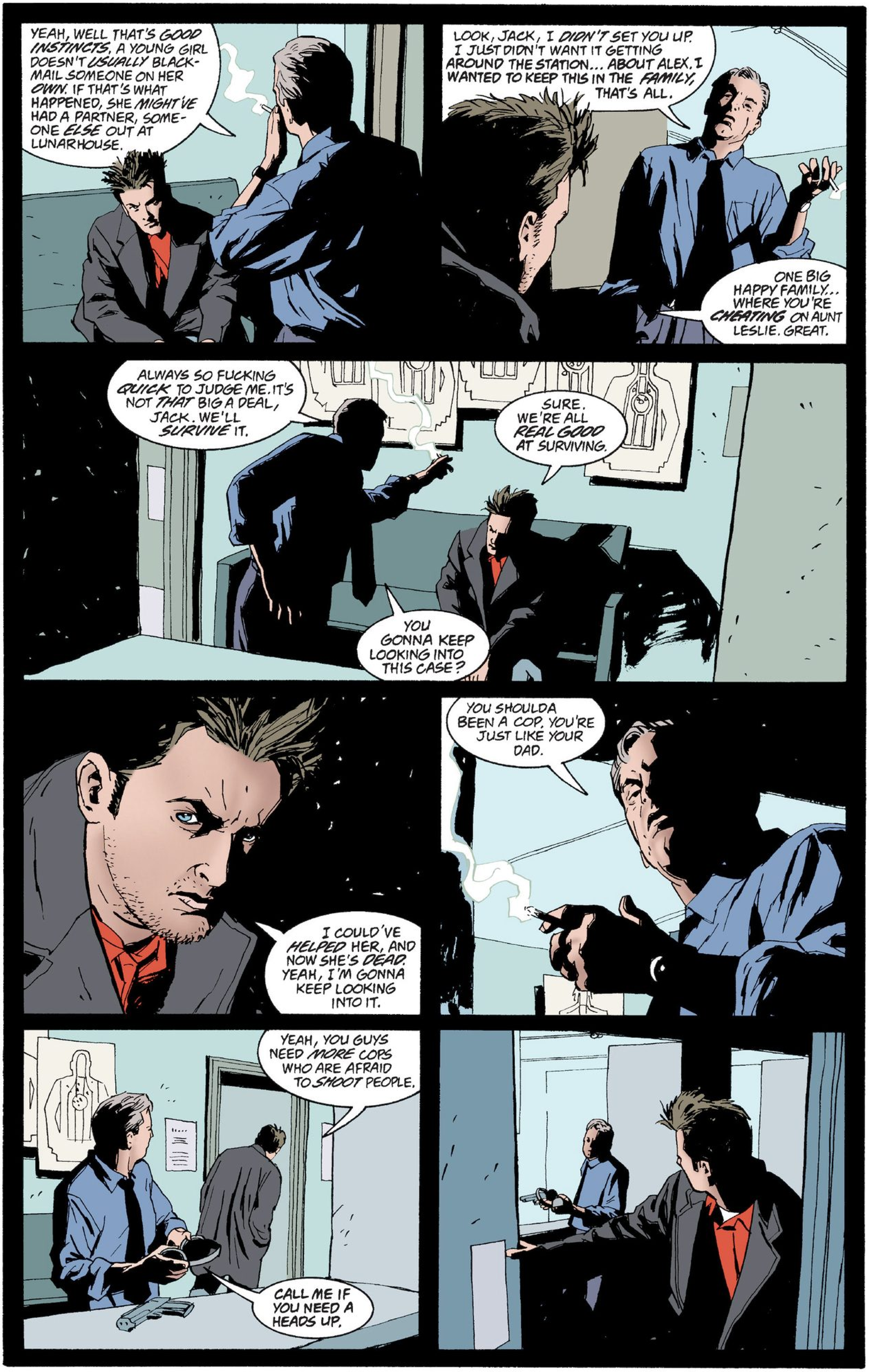

After trying Alexandra Jordan's number a few times and continuing to get her machine, I realized where she probably was-- in a cold basement in Santa Cruz looking at the empty shell of her sister.
But I needed to talk to her, so I went over anyway and waited around.
She arrived home at 5:30 with an older woman, who I assumed was her mother.
I gave them about fifteen minutes, and then I followed them up.
I didn't like bothering them at a time like this, but it probably wouldn't make much difference. For the next few days, everyone they knew would seem like an intruder.
YES?
I'M HERE TO SEE ALEXANDRA, I'M JACK HERRIMAN...
OH, THE DETECTIVE.
I'M HER MOTHER. I'M AFRAID YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO TALK TO ALEX, SHE TOOK A SLEEPING PILL. SHE'S NOT HOLDING UP SO WELL...
YOU HEARD...ABOUT HER SISTER?
THAT'S WHY I'M HERE... I'D LIKE TO ASK A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT MAGGIE...


IT'S A LITTLE *LATE* FOR *THAT*, ISN'T IT? WHAT GOOD CAN YOU DO *NOW*?
I JUST WANT TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED. I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'LL HELP *YOU* OR *NOT*...
YOU WERE HIRED TO FIND MY DAUGHTER, AND *WHEN* YOU FOUND HER, YOU LEFT HER ALONE IN A MOTEL ROOM... WITH A *LOADED* GUN.
WHY WOULD I ASK FOR YOUR HELP AGAIN?
LOOK, I *LEFT* HER THERE BECAUSE SHE SEEMED *OKAY*. I WASN'T HIRED TO *KIDNAP* HER.
IF *ALEX* HAD BEEN A LITTLE MORE *UP FRONT* ABOUT THE *FACTS*, THEN MAYBE I WOULD HAVE BEEN A LITTLE MORE *CAUTIOUS*..
I WAS *TOLD* THIS WAS A SIMPLE JOB.
WHAT *FACTS*?
I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE LIKE *WHY* MAGGIE WOULD BE CARRYING AROUND TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN *CASH*.
I DIDN'T *KNOW* MAGGIE VERY WELL. NOT ANYMORE. WE DRIFTED APART YEARS AGO.
IS IT *POSSIBLE* THAT SHE WAS *BLACKMAILING* SOMEONE?
ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE WHERE *MAGGIE'S* CONCERNED. YOU KNOW, WHEN I GOT THAT CALL THIS MORNING, I WASN'T EVEN *SHOCKED*.. NOT REALLY.
I GUESS I'D BEEN *EXPECTING* IT FOR YEARS.
YOU SHOULD GO, MR. HERRIMAN. WE *DON'T* NEED YOUR HELP.
WAIT. JUST *WAIT A SECOND*.. ALEX SAID SOMETHING ABOUT MAGGIE HAVING A *WILD PAST*.
WHAT DID SHE *MEAN* BY THAT?

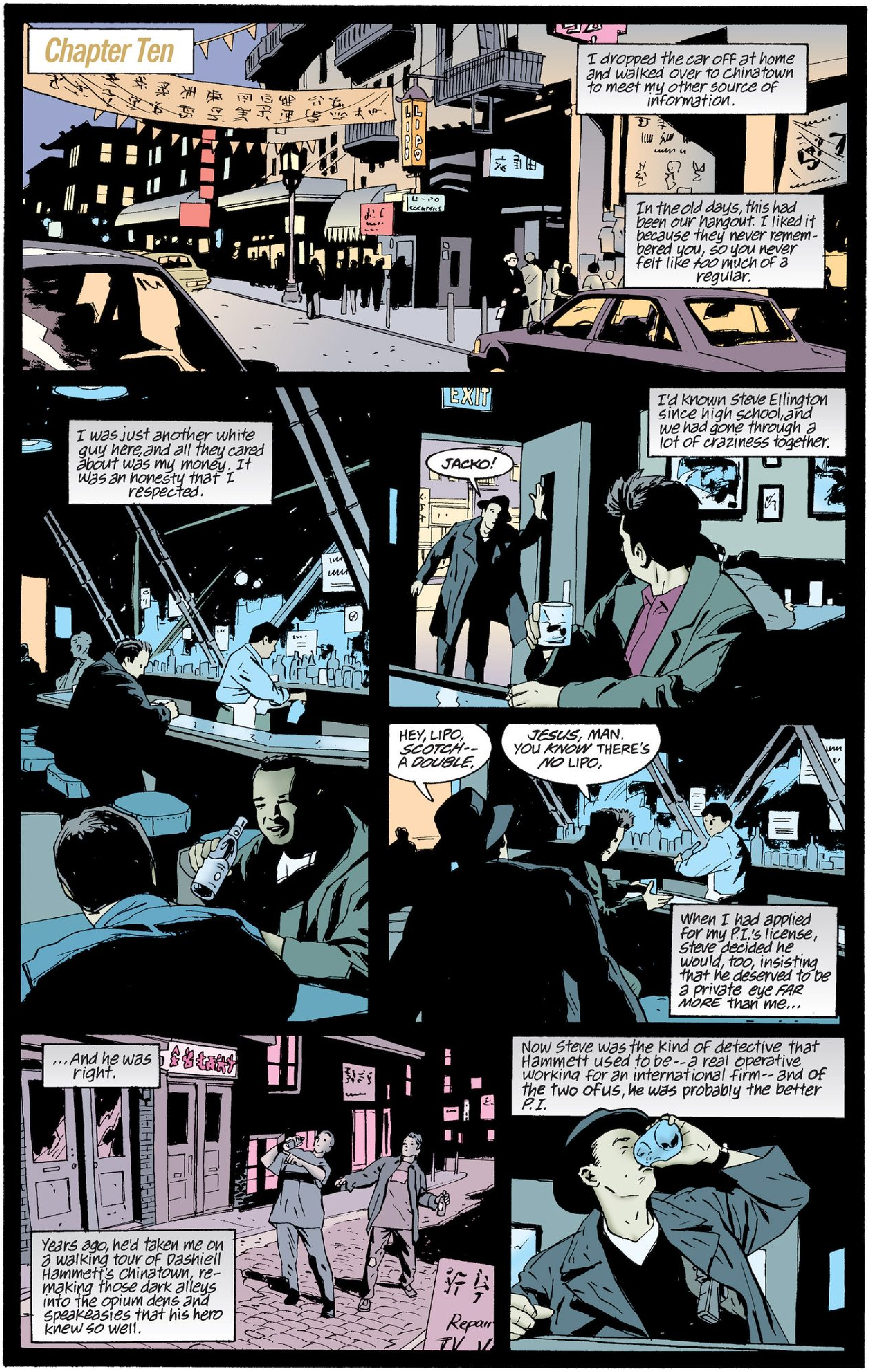

I'M NOT GOING TO DREDGE UP MY OLD PROBLEMS RIGHT NOW. YOU'LL HAVE TO FIND YOUR SATISFACTION SOMEWHERE ELSE.
I HOPE YOU'RE GIVING THE POLICE MORE CO-OPERATION THAN THIS.
WE MADE A MISTAKE BY NOT GOING TO THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE, OBVIOUSLY.
THAT'S WHAT I TOLD ALEX.
LOOK, CAN I AT LEAST USE THE PHONE?
If Mrs. Jordan wouldn't cooperate, I'd have to try my own sources...
YEAH, STEVE ELLINGTON PLEASE...
SURE, I'LL HOLD...
UH HUH... HUH HUH HUH...
... UH HUH HUH...
That was quite a sleeping pill. Why couldn't either of these women just tell me the truth?

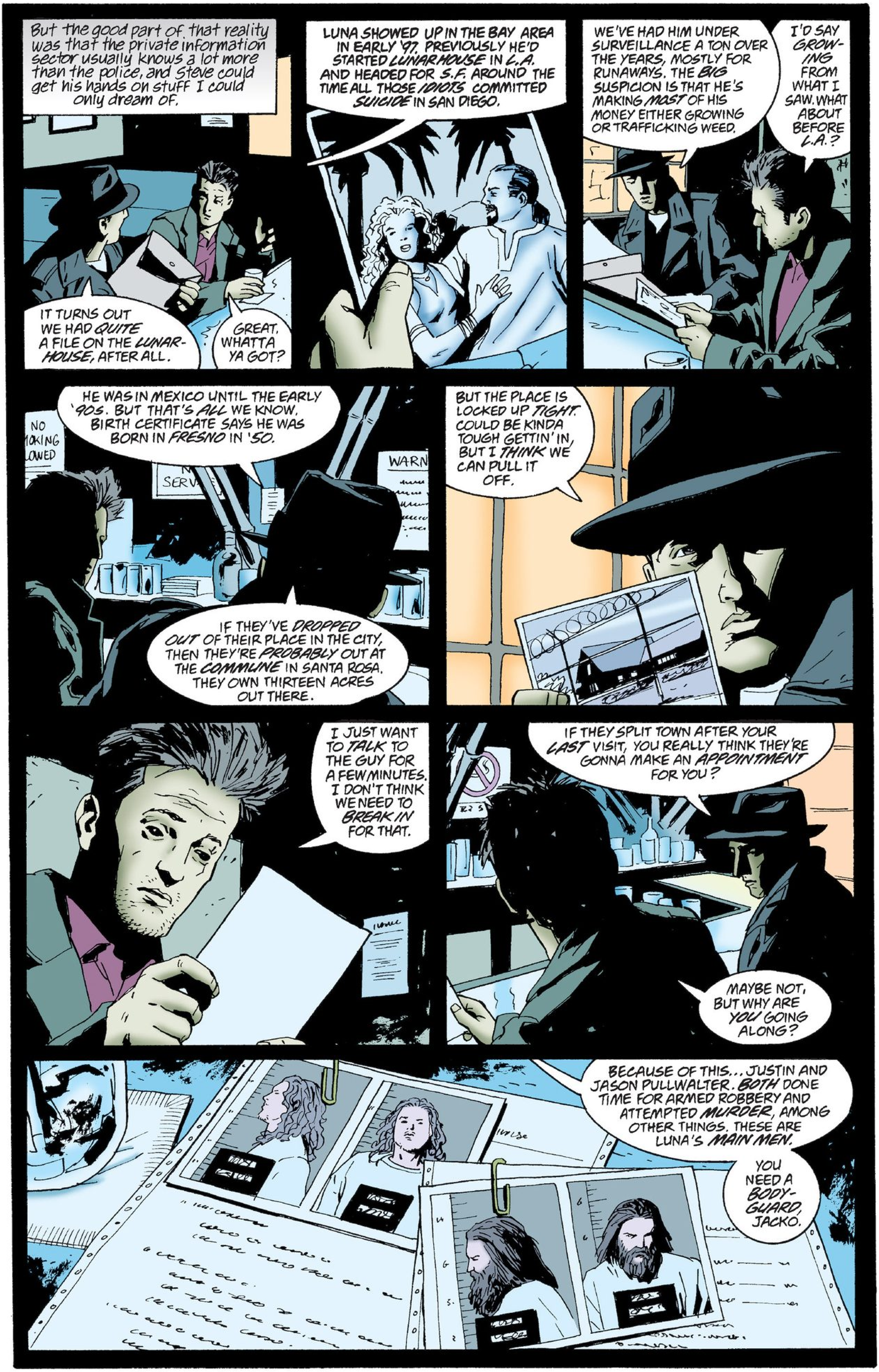

Chapter Nine
I'd spent far too much time in courthouses and police stations while growing up to ever be comfortable in them now. I was always overcome with a fear that I wouldn't be allowed to leave--that I'd be put away for a crime only just discovered...
--Though long buried in my past.
VEHICLE
NG ONLY
1702
Whitey had come up with some noteworthy items. Maggie Jordan had been arrested as a teenager for arson, possession of drugs, and even once for prostitution.
JESUS... SHE MUST'VE BEEN A *NIGHTMARE*.
As an adult she'd had a few busts for pot and coke, but nothing major. And certainly nothing that seemed to suggest a sudden leap to blackmail.
Technically her juvenile records were *SEALED*, but there was never a confidential file that Whitey couldn't access.
A patrolman until his back was broken in an accident a few years ago, he was now the best information tracker that the *SFPD* had. He followed a paper trail like a bloodhound.
NOW, *HERE'S* AN INTERESTING TIDBIT: IN '92 *ALEXANDRA* JORDAN WAS ARRESTED FOR STABBING HER *MOTHER*. MINOR WOUNDS INFLICTED, APPARENTLY, AND SHE GOT OFF WITH JUST *PROBATION*.
YOU'RE *KIDDING*...
I SHIT YOU *NOT*. BUT OTHER THAN THE ONE "*PSYCHO*" IMITATION, SHE'S CLEAN.
MAYBE I SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL NEXT TIME I QUESTION HER.
JUST DON'T INTERROGATE HER WHILE SHE'S COOKING.

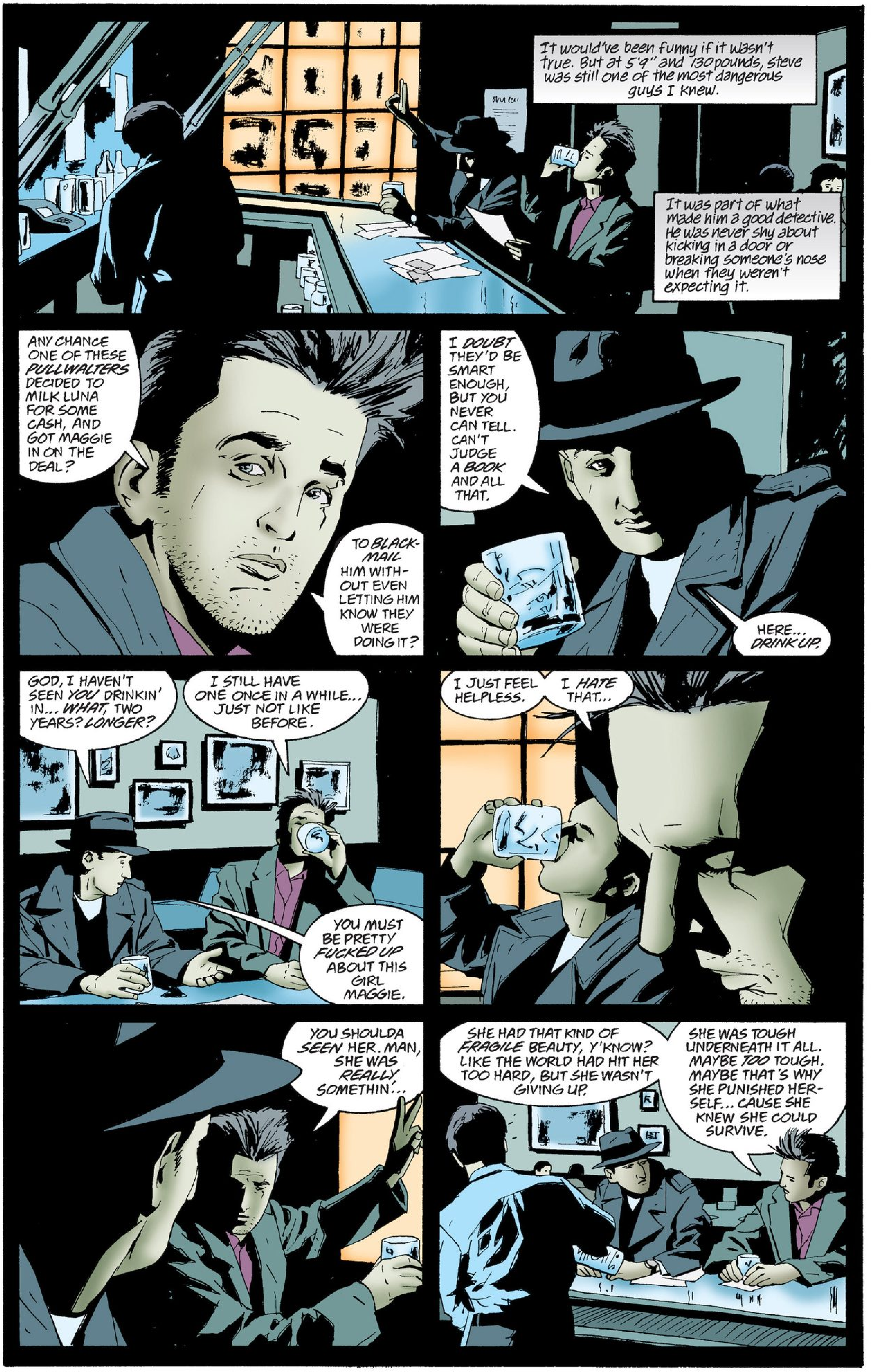

ANYWAY, HER MOM'S GOT A FEW ARRESTS IN THE '70s FOR PROTESTING, AND GROWING *POT*, BUT NOTHING IN THE LAST 20 YEARS.
WHAT ABOUT *LUNA?*
NADA. ZILCH. HE'S BEEN QUESTIONED *TWICE* IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS ABOUT POSSIBLE UNDERAGE SEX STUFF, BUT NOTHING ELSE. NOT EVEN A *TRAFFIC* TICKET.
SHIT. WELL, KEEP ME POSTED IF YOU FIND ANYTHING ELSE... YOU SEEN RAYMONDS AROUND TONIGHT?
YEAH, HE SHOULD BE AROUND SOMEWHERE. TRY THE SMOKING ROOM.
I found him at target practice, which was awkward, but at least it was a private enough place to have a personal conversation.
YOU SET ME *UP*, DIDN'T YOU?
WHAT?! IS THAT A *JOKE?*
YEAH, *SOME* JOKE. YOU SEND YOUR *GIRLFRIEND* TO ME TO FIND HER SISTER. THEN HER SISTER WINDS UP *DEAD* THE NEXT DAY WITH A SUITCASE FULL OF *CASH*.
GOD THOSE CRUZ COPS SURE KNOW HOW TO KEEP A *LID* ON THINGS.
GET TO THE PART WHERE I SET YOU UP.
YOU HAD TA *KNOW* MAGGIE WAS INTO *SOMETHING FUCKED-UP*. WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST *TELL ME?!*
I DIDN'T KNOW *SHIT*. ALEX JUST WANTED TO KEEP THE *POLICE* OUT OF IT, WHICH WAS FINE BY ME.
YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE *MONEY?*
I WAS AS SURPRISED AS YOU. ALEX SAYS *SHE* DOESN'T KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM *EITHER*.
SO WHATTA YOU *FIGURE?* WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GIRL?
I told him everything about the past two days, and that it seemed like maybe Maggie could have been blackmailing Luna for any number of reasons--
--but *SOMETHING* about that just didn't feel right.

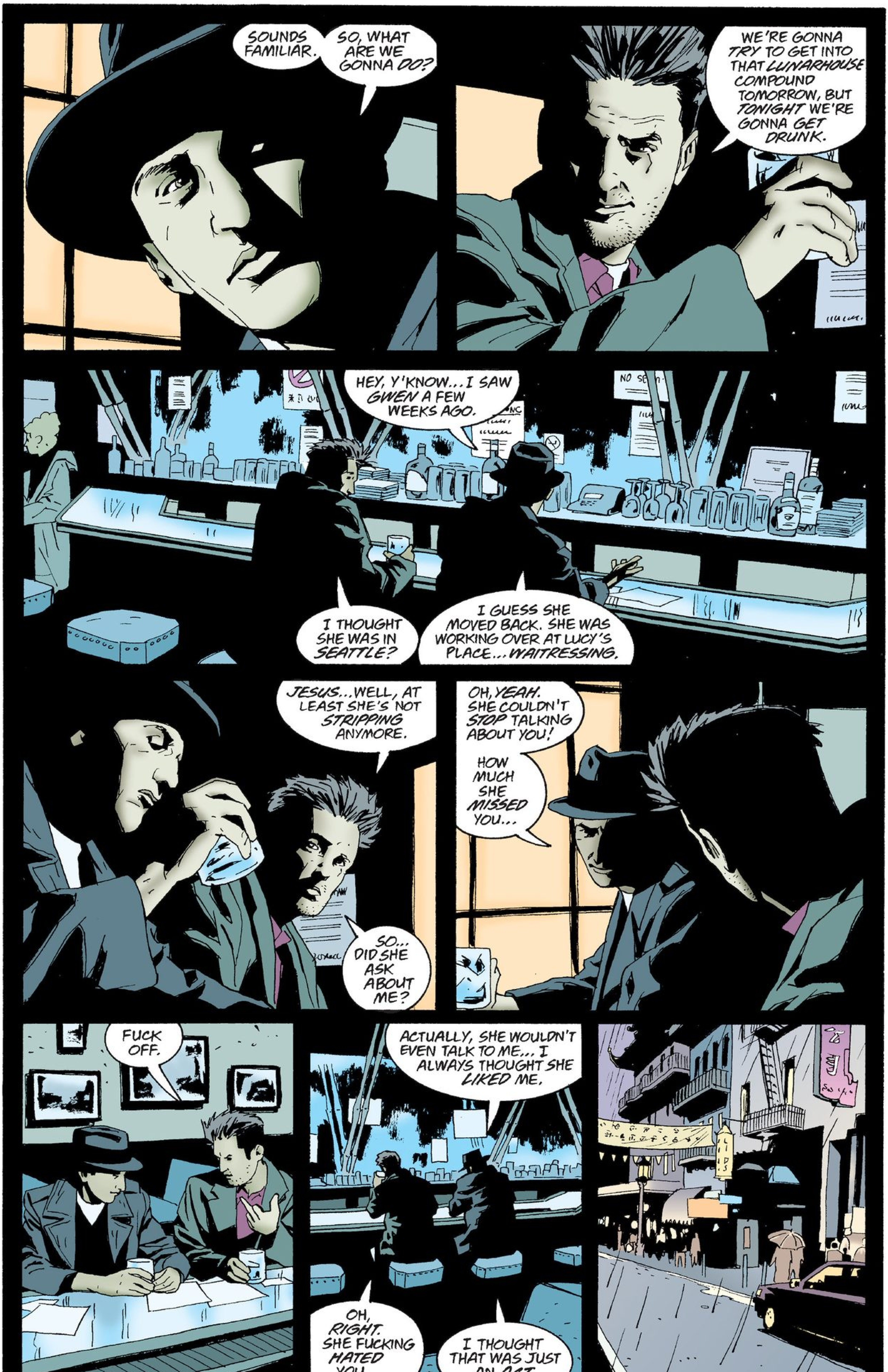

YEAH, WELL THAT'S GOOD INSTINCTS, A YOUNG GIRL DOESN'T USUALLY BLACKMAIL SOMEONE ON HER OWN. IF THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED, SHE MIGHT'VE HAD A PARTNER, SOMEONE ELSE OUT AT LUNARHOUSE.
LOOK, JACK, I DIDN'T SET YOU UP. I JUST DIDN'T WANT IT GETTING AROUND THE STATION... ABOUT ALEX. I WANTED TO KEEP THIS IN THE FAMILY, THAT'S ALL.
ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY... WHERE YOU'RE CHEATING ON AUNT LESLIE. GREAT.
ALWAYS SO FUCKING QUICK TO JUDGE ME. IT'S NOT THAT BIG A DEAL, JACK. WE'LL SURVIVE IT.
SURE. WE'RE ALL REAL GOOD AT SURVIVING.
YOU GONNA KEEP LOOKING INTO THIS CASE?
I COULD'VE HELPED HER, AND NOW SHE'S DEAD. YEAH, I'M GONNA KEEP LOOKING INTO IT.
YOU SHOULDA BEEN A COP. YOU'RE JUST LIKE YOUR DAD.
YEAH, YOU GUYS NEED MORE COPS WHO ARE AFRAID TO SHOOT PEOPLE.
CALL ME IF YOU NEED A HEADS UP.

Chapter Ten

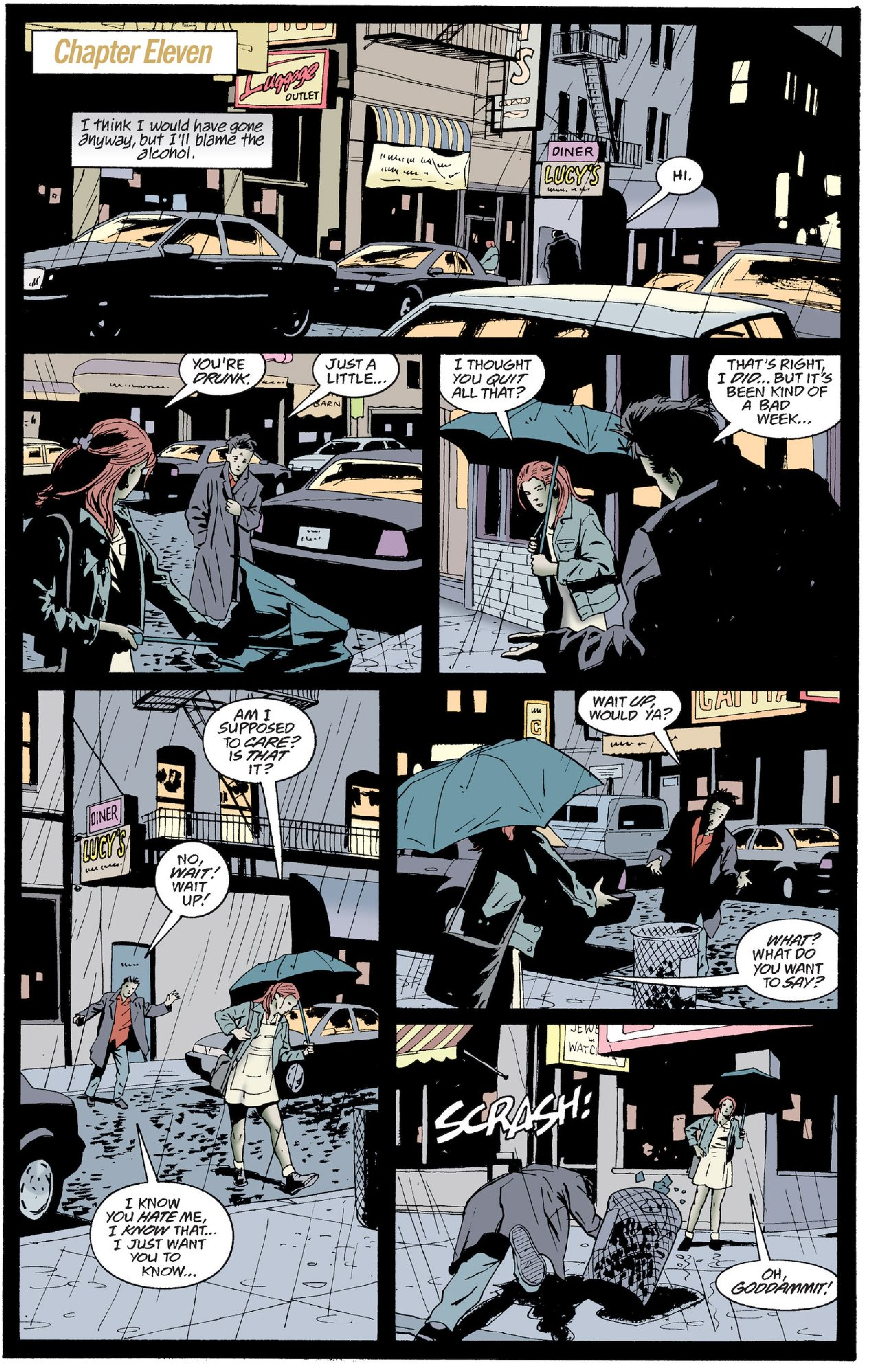

I dropped the car off at home and walked over to Chinatown to meet my other source of information.
LIPO
LI-PO COCKTAILS
In the old days, this had been our hangout. I liked it because they never remembered you, so you never felt like *too* much of a regular.
I was just another white guy here, and all they cared about was my money. It was an honesty that I respected.
EXIT
I'd known Steve Ellington since high school, and we had gone through a lot of craziness together.
JACKO!
HEY, LIPO, *SCOTCH*-- A *DOUBLE*.
JESUS, MAN. YOU *KNOW* THERE'S *NO* LIPO.
When I had applied for my P.I.'s license, Steve decided he would, too, insisting that he deserved to be a private eye *FAR MORE* than me...
...And he was right.
Years ago, he'd taken me on a walking tour of Dashiell Hammett's Chinatown, re-making those dark alleys into the opium dens and speakeasies that his hero knew so well.
Repair
TV V
Now Steve was the kind of detective that Hammett used to be--a real operative working for an international firm--and of the two of us, he was probably the better P.I.

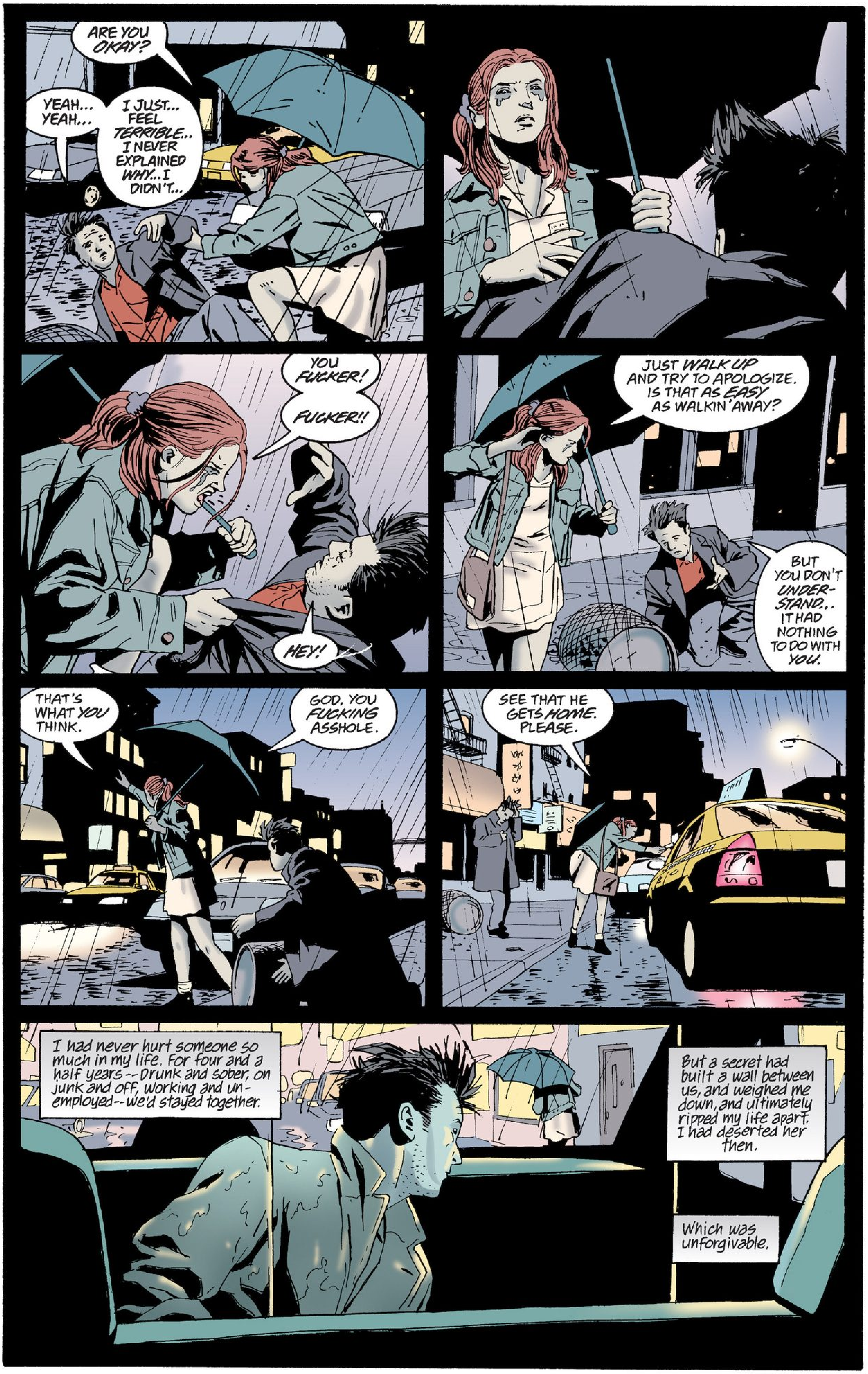

But the good part of that reality was that the private information sector usually knows a lot more than the police, and Steve could get his hands on stuff I could only dream of.
IT TURNS OUT WE HAD QUITE A FILE ON THE LUNAR-HOUSE, AFTER ALL.
GREAT. WHATTA YA GOT?
LUNA SHOWED UP IN THE BAY AREA IN EARLY '97. PREVIOUSLY HE'D STARTED LUNAR HOUSE IN L.A. AND HEADED FOR S.F. AROUND THE TIME ALL THOSE IDIOTS COMMITTED SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO.
WE'VE HAD HIM UNDER SURVEILLANCE A TON OVER THE YEARS, MOSTLY FOR RUNAWAYS. THE BIG SUSPICION IS THAT HE'S MAKING MOST OF HIS MONEY EITHER GROWING OR TRAFFICKING WEED.
I'D SAY GROWING FROM WHAT I SAW. WHAT ABOUT BEFORE L.A.?
HE WAS IN MEXICO UNTIL THE EARLY '90S. BUT THAT'S ALL WE KNOW. BIRTH CERTIFICATE SAYS HE WAS BORN IN FRESNO IN '50.
WARN
IF THEY'VE DROPPED OUT OF THEIR PLACE IN THE CITY, THEN THEY'RE PROBABLY OUT AT THE COMMUNE IN SANTA ROSA. THEY OWN THIRTEEN ACRES OUT THERE.
BUT THE PLACE IS LOCKED UP TIGHT. COULD BE KINDA TOUGH GETTIN' IN, BUT I THINK WE CAN PULL IT OFF.
I JUST WANT TO TALK TO THE GUY FOR A FEW MINUTES. I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO BREAK IN FOR THAT.
IF THEY SPLIT TOWN AFTER YOUR LAST VISIT, YOU REALLY THINK THEY'RE GONNA MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR YOU?
MAYBE NOT, BUT WHY ARE YOU GOING ALONG?
BECAUSE OF THIS... JUSTIN AND JASON PULLWALTER. BOTH DONE TIME FOR ARMED ROBBERY AND ATTEMPTED MURDER, AMONG OTHER THINGS. THESE ARE LUNA'S MAIN MEN.
YOU NEED A BODY-GUARD, JACKO.

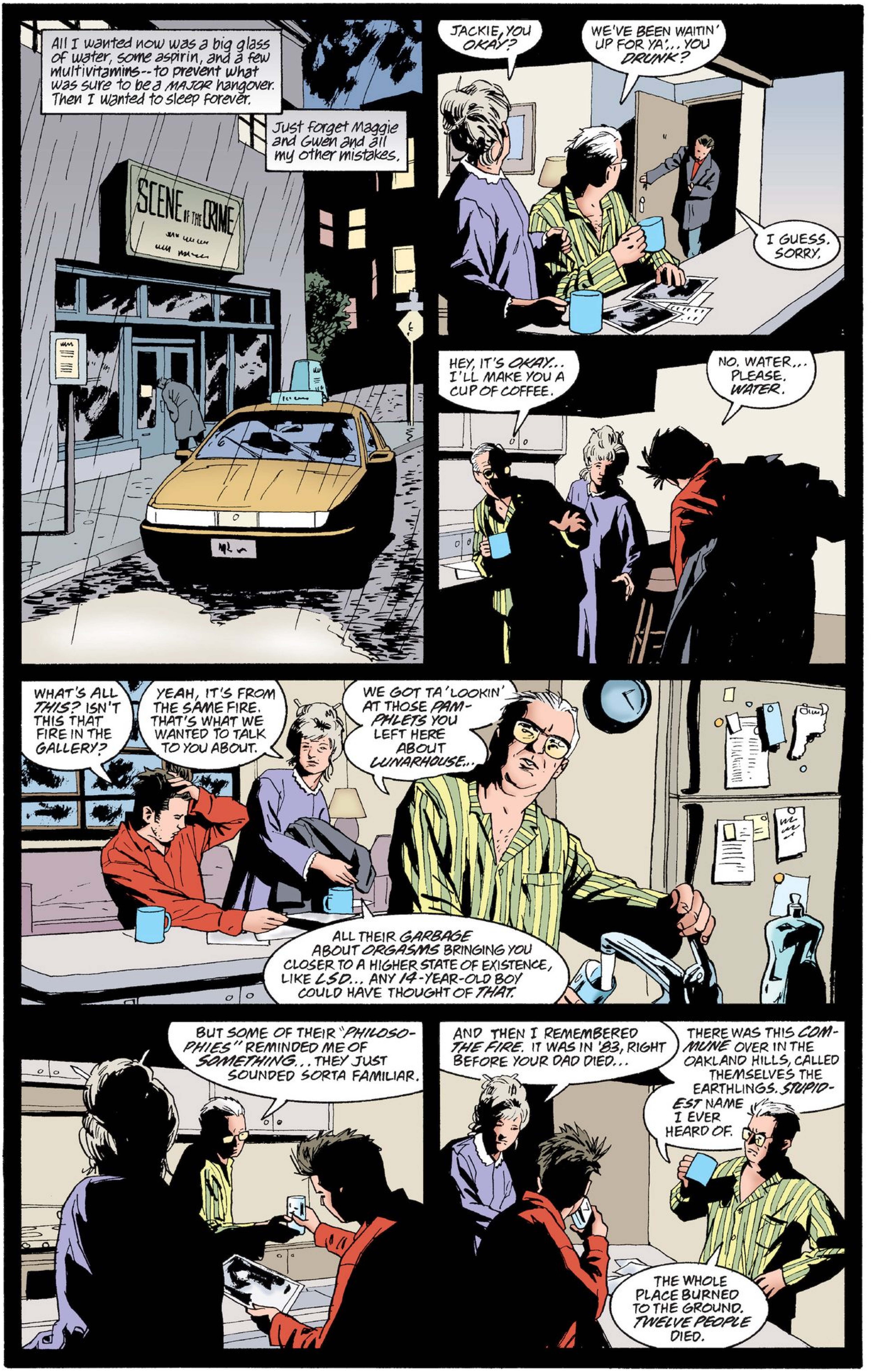

It would've been funny if it wasn't true. But at 5'9" and 130 pounds, steve was still one of the most dangerous guys I knew.
It was part of what made him a good detective. He was never shy about kicking in a door or breaking someone's nose when they weren't expecting it.
ANY CHANCE ONE OF THESE *PULLWALTERS* DECIDED TO MILK LUNA FOR SOME CASH, AND GOT MAGGIE IN ON THE DEAL?
TO *BLACKMAIL* HIM WITHOUT EVEN LETTING HIM KNOW THEY WERE DOING IT?
I *DOUBT* THEY'D BE SMART ENOUGH, BUT YOU NEVER CAN TELL. CAN'T JUDGE A *BOOK* AND ALL THAT.
HERE... *DRINK UP.*
GOD, I HAVEN'T SEEN *YOU* DRINKIN' IN... *WHAT,* TWO YEARS? *LONGER?*
I STILL HAVE ONE ONCE IN A WHILE... JUST NOT LIKE BEFORE.
YOU MUST BE PRETTY *FUCKED UP* ABOUT THIS GIRL MAGGIE.
I JUST FEEL HELPLESS.
I *HATE* THAT...
YOU SHOULDA *SEEN* HER. MAN, SHE WAS *REALLY* SOMETHIN'...
SHE HAD THAT KIND OF *FRAGILE* BEAUTY, Y'KNOW? LIKE THE WORLD HAD HIT HER TOO HARD, BUT SHE WASN'T GIVING UP.
SHE WAS TOUGH UNDERNEATH IT ALL. MAYBE *TOO* TOUGH. MAYBE THAT'S WHY SHE PUNISHED HERSELF... CAUSE SHE KNEW SHE COULD SURVIVE.

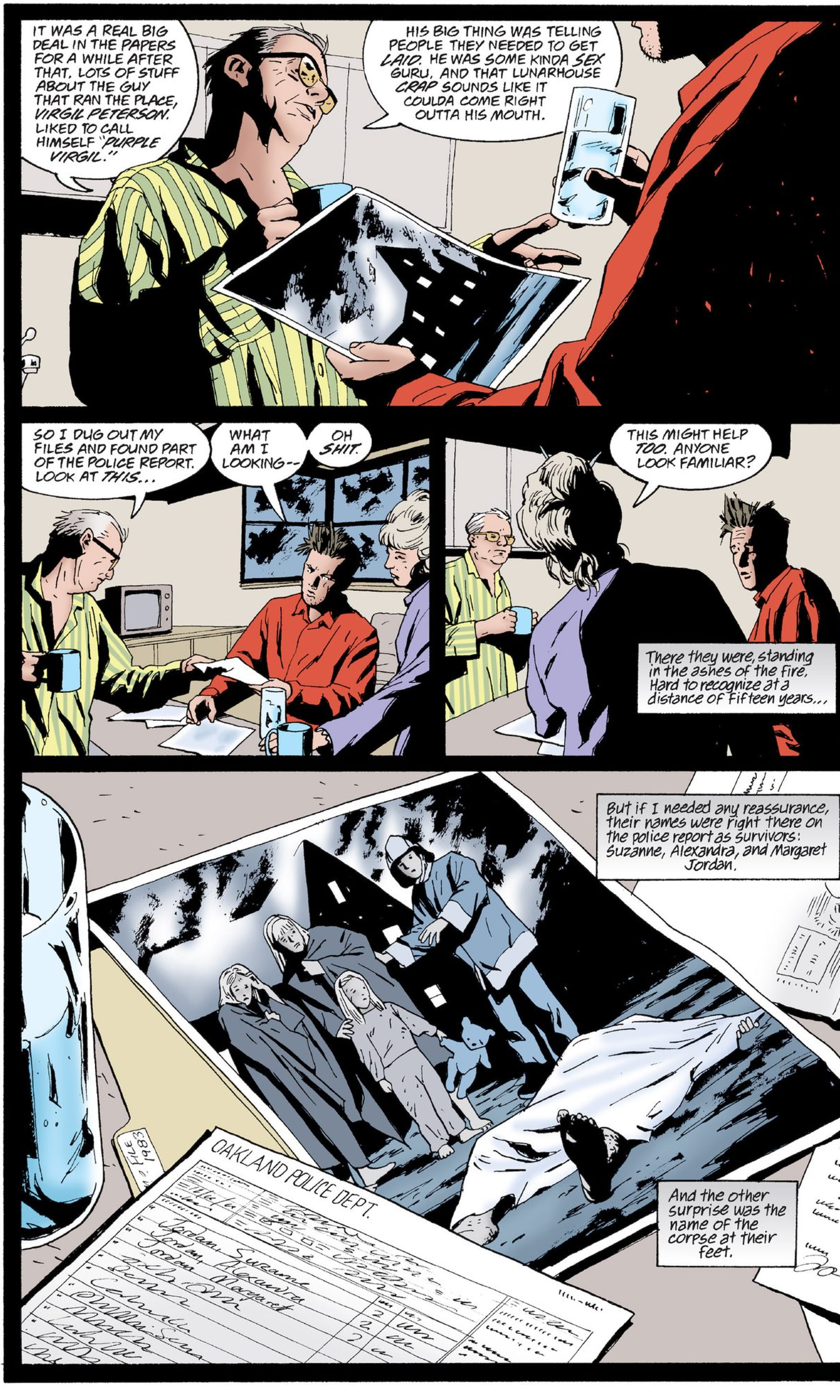

SOUNDS FAMILIAR.
SO, WHAT ARE WE GONNA *DO*?
WE'RE GONNA *TRY* TO GET INTO THAT *LUNARHOUSE* COMPOUND TOMORROW, BUT *TONIGHT* WE'RE GONNA *GET DRUNK*.
HEY, Y'KNOW... I SAW *GWEN* A FEW WEEKS AGO.
I THOUGHT SHE WAS IN *SEATTLE*?
I GUESS SHE MOVED BACK. SHE WAS WORKING OVER AT LUCY'S PLACE... *WAITRESSING*.
JESUS... WELL, AT LEAST SHE'S NOT *STRIPPING* ANYMORE.
SO... DID SHE ASK ABOUT ME?
OH, *YEAH*. SHE COULDN'T *STOP* TALKING ABOUT YOU!
HOW MUCH SHE *MISSED* YOU...
FUCK OFF.
ACTUALLY, SHE WOULDN'T EVEN TALK TO ME... I ALWAYS THOUGHT SHE *LIKED* ME.
OH, *RIGHT*. SHE FUCKING *HATED* YOU.
I THOUGHT THAT WAS JUST AN *ACT*.

Chapter Eleven

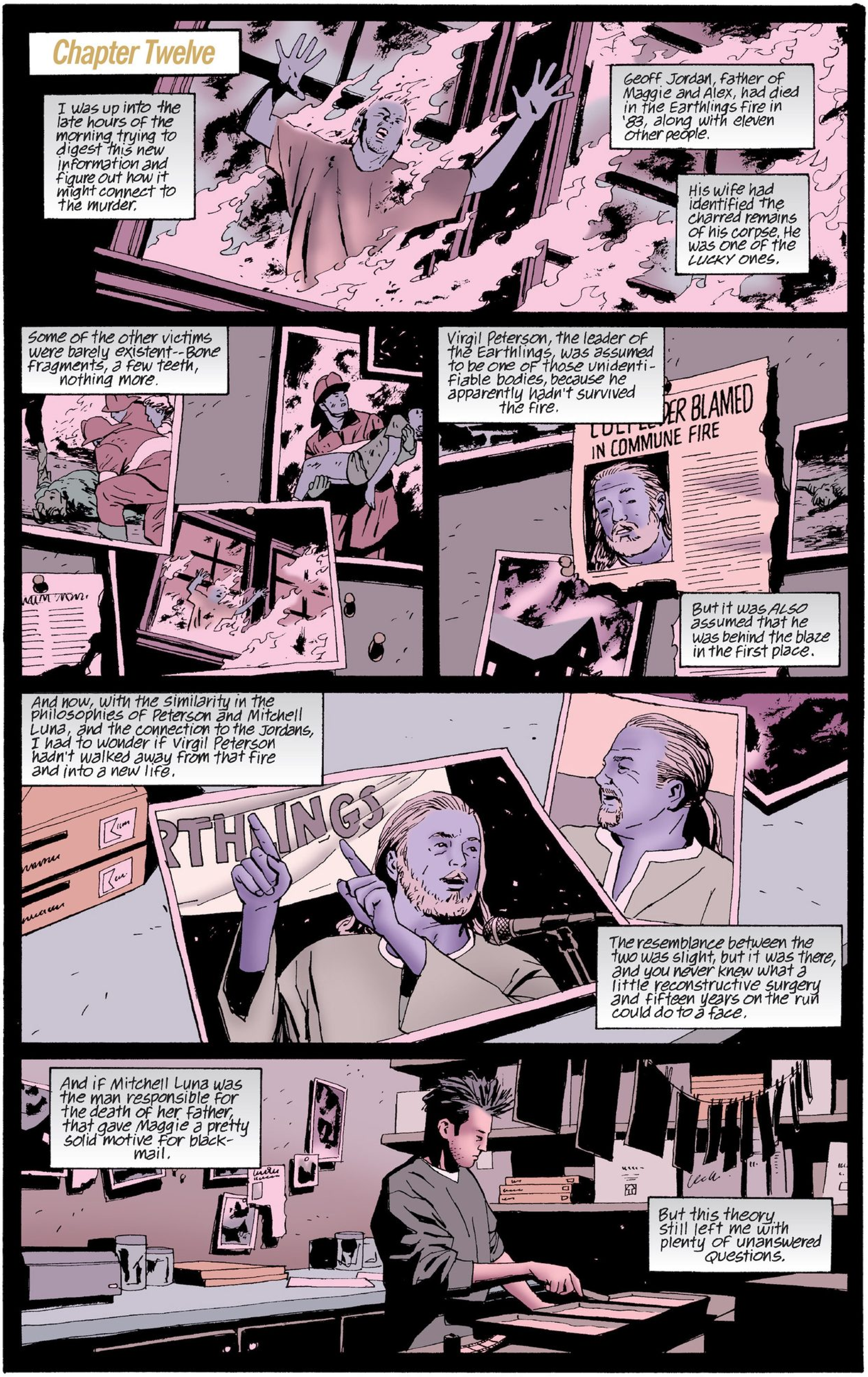

Luggage OUTLET
I think I would have gone anyway, but I'll blame the alcohol.
DINER
LUCY'S
HI.
YOU'RE *DRUNK*.
JUST A LITTLE...
BARN
I THOUGHT YOU *QUIT* ALL THAT?
THAT'S RIGHT, I *DID*... BUT IT'S BEEN KIND OF A BAD WEEK...
AM I SUPPOSED TO *CARE*? IS *THAT* IT?
DINER
LUCY'S
NO, *WAIT!* WAIT UP!
I KNOW YOU *HATE* ME, I *KNOW* THAT... I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW...
WAIT *UP*, WOULD YA?
WHAT? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO *SAY?*
JEWE WATC
SCRASH!
OH, GODDAMMIT!

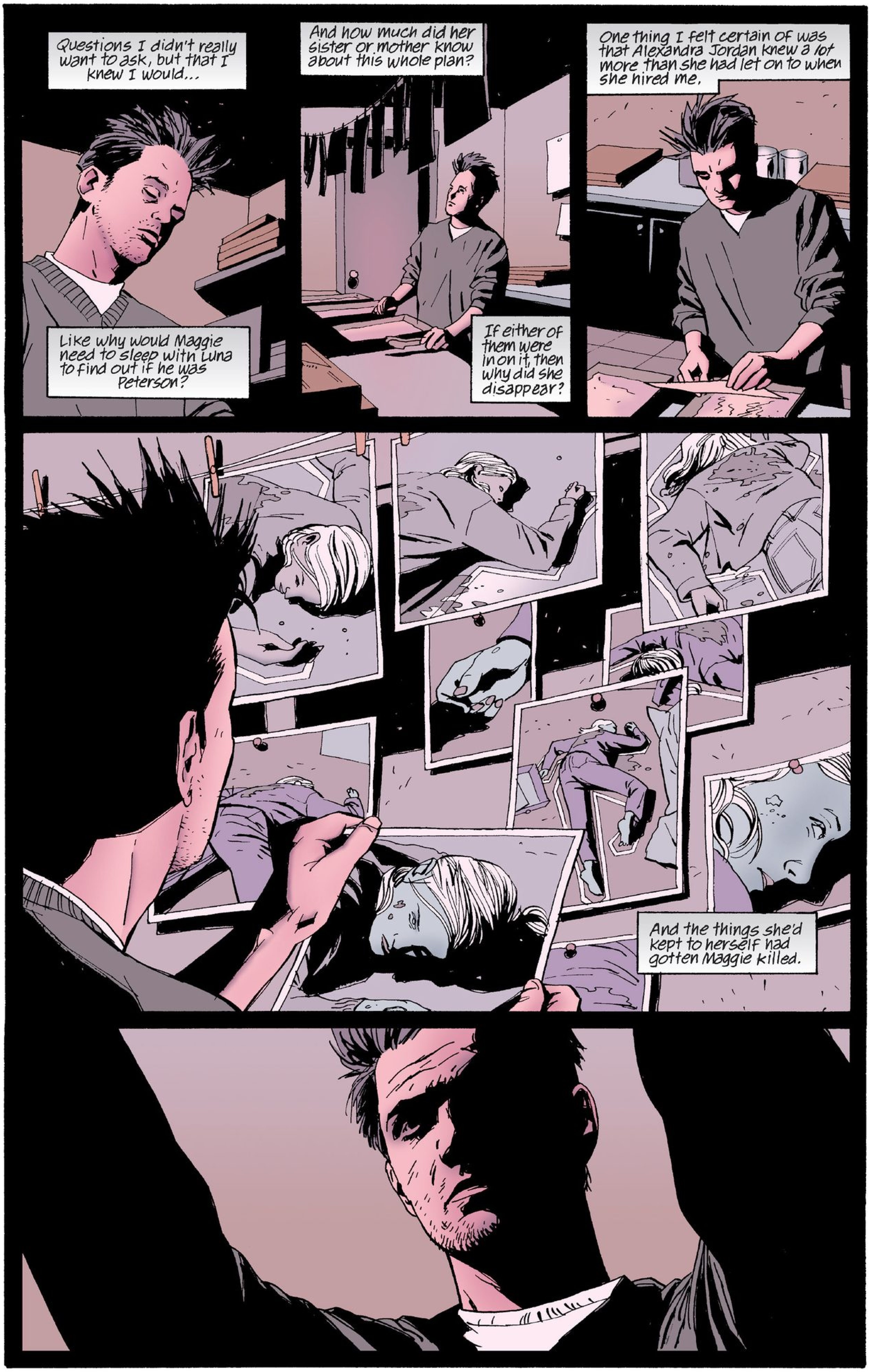

ARE YOU OKAY?
YEAH... YEAH...
I JUST... FEEL TERRIBLE... I NEVER EXPLAINED WHY... I DIDN'T...
YOU FUCKER!
FUCKER!!
HEY!
JUST WALK UP AND TRY TO APOLOGIZE. IS THAT AS EASY AS WALKIN' AWAY?
BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND... IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK.
GOD, YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE.
SEE THAT HE GETS HOME. PLEASE.
I had never hurt someone so much in my life. For four and a half years--Drunk and sober, on junk and off, working and unemployed--we'd stayed together.
But a secret had built a wall between us, and weighed me down, and ultimately ripped my life apart. I had deserted her then.
Which was unforgivable.

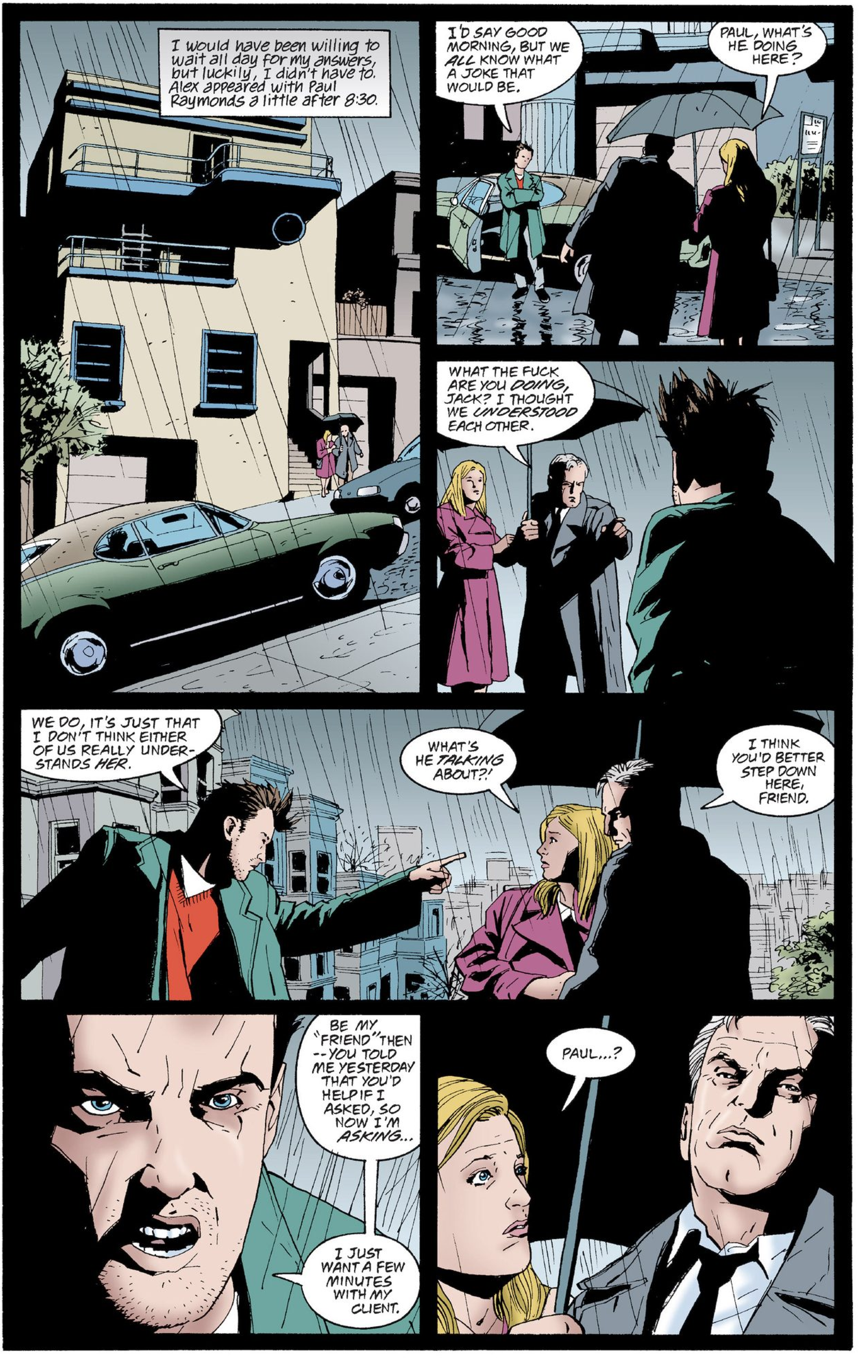

All I wanted now was a big glass of water, some aspirin, and a few multivitamins--to prevent what was sure to be a MAJOR hangover. Then I wanted to sleep forever.
Just forget Maggie and Gwen and all my other mistakes.
SCENE OF THE CRIME
JACKIE, YOU OKAY?
WE'VE BEEN WAITIN' UP FOR YA'... YOU DRUNK?
I GUESS. SORRY.
HEY, IT'S OKAY... I'LL MAKE YOU A CUP OF COFFEE.
NO. WATER... PLEASE. WATER.
WHAT'S ALL THIS? ISN'T THIS THAT FIRE IN THE GALLERY?
YEAH, IT'S FROM THE SAME FIRE. THAT'S WHAT WE WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
WE GOT TA' LOOKIN' AT THOSE PAMPHLETS YOU LEFT HERE ABOUT LUNARHOUSE...
ALL THEIR GARBAGE ABOUT ORGASMS BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO A HIGHER STATE OF EXISTENCE, LIKE LSD... ANY 14-YEAR-OLD BOY COULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT.
BUT SOME OF THEIR "PHILOSOPHIES" REMINDED ME OF SOMETHING... THEY JUST SOUNDED SORTA FAMILIAR.
AND THEN I REMEMBERED THE FIRE. IT WAS IN '83, RIGHT BEFORE YOUR DAD DIED...
THERE WAS THIS COMMUNE OVER IN THE OAKLAND HILLS, CALLED THEMSELVES THE EARTHLINGS. STUPIDEST NAME I EVER HEARD OF.
THE WHOLE PLACE BURNED TO THE GROUND. TWELVE PEOPLE DIED.

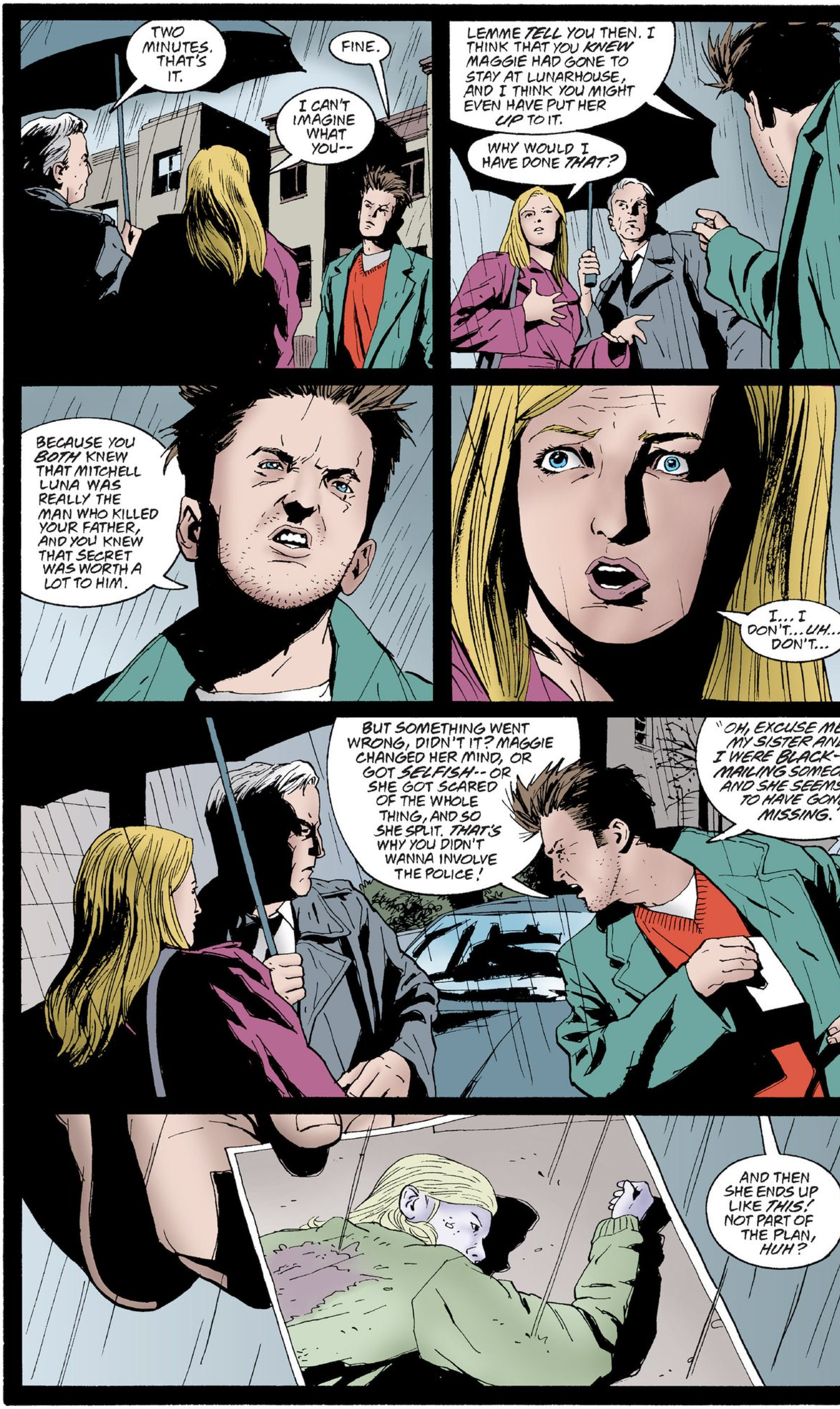

IT WAS A REAL BIG DEAL IN THE PAPERS FOR A WHILE AFTER THAT. LOTS OF STUFF ABOUT THE GUY THAT RAN THE PLACE, *VIRGIL PETERSON.* LIKED TO CALL HIMSELF "*PURPLE VIRGIL.*"
HIS BIG THING WAS TELLING PEOPLE THEY NEEDED TO GET *LAID.* HE WAS SOME KINDA *SEX* GURU, AND THAT LUNARHOUSE *CRAP* SOUNDS LIKE IT COULDA COME RIGHT OUTTA HIS MOUTH.
SO I DUG OUT MY FILES AND FOUND PART OF THE POLICE REPORT. LOOK AT *THIS*...
WHAT AM I LOOKING--
OH *SHIT.*
THIS MIGHT HELP *TOO.* ANYONE LOOK FAMILIAR?
There they were, standing in the ashes of the fire. Hard to recognize at a distance of fifteen years...
But if I needed any reassurance, their names were right there on the police report as survivors: Suzanne, Alexandra, and Margaret Jordan.
FILE 1983
OAKLAND POLICE DEPT.
Jordan, Suzanne
Jordan, Alexandra
Jordan, Margaret
And the other surprise was the name of the corpse at their feet.

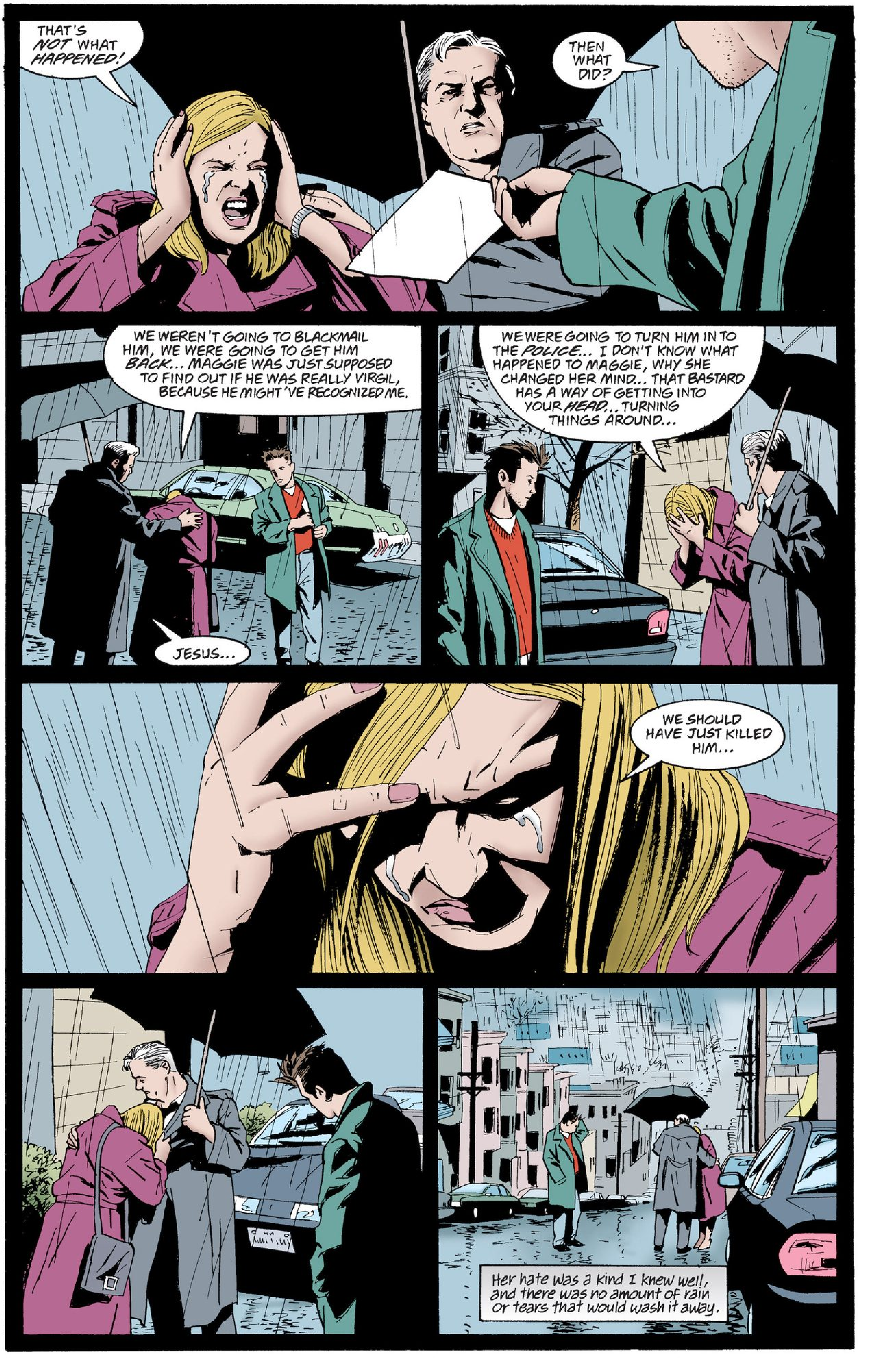
Chapter Twelve


I was up into the late hours of the morning trying to digest this new information and figure out how it might connect to the murder.
Geoff Jordan, father of Maggie and Alex, had died in the Earthlings fire in '83, along with eleven other people.
His wife had identified the charred remains of his corpse. He was one of the *LUCKY ones.*
Some of the other victims were barely existent--Bone fragments, a few teeth, nothing more.
Virgil Peterson, the leader of the Earthlings, was assumed to be one of those unidentifiable bodies, because he apparently hadn't survived the fire.
DER BLAMED
IN COMMUNE FIRE
But it was *ALSO* assumed that he was behind the blaze in the first place.
And now, with the similarity in the philosophies of Peterson and Mitchell Luna, and the connection to the Jordans, I had to wonder if Virgil Peterson hadn't walked away from that fire and into a new life.
RTHLINGS
The resemblance between the two was slight, but it was there, and you never knew what a little reconstructive surgery and fifteen years on the run could do to a face.
And if Mitchell Luna was the man responsible for the death of her father, that gave Maggie a pretty solid motive for blackmail.
But this theory still left me with plenty of unanswered questions.


Questions I didn't really want to ask, but that I knew I would...
Like why would Maggie need to sleep with Luna to find out if he was Peterson?
And how much did her sister or mother know about this whole plan?
If either of them were in on it, then why did she disappear?
One thing I felt certain of was that Alexandra Jordan knew a lot more than she had let on to when she hired me.
And the things she'd kept to herself had gotten Maggie killed.

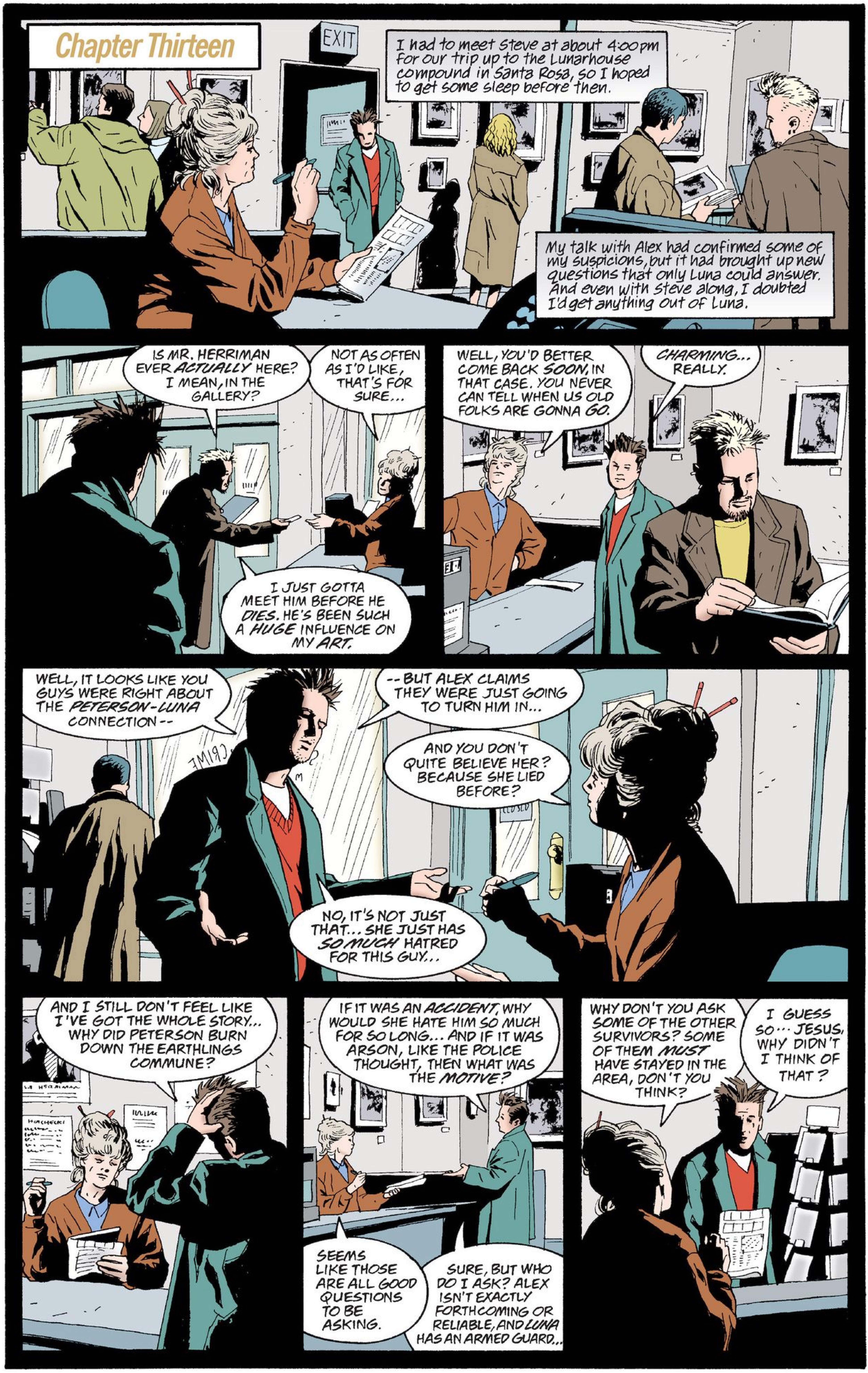

I would have been willing to wait all day for my answers, but luckily, I didn't have to. Alex appeared with Paul Raymonds a little after 8:30.
I'D SAY GOOD MORNING, BUT WE *ALL* KNOW WHAT A JOKE THAT WOULD BE.
PAUL, WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU *DOING*, JACK? I THOUGHT WE *UNDERSTOOD* EACH OTHER.
WE DO, IT'S JUST THAT I DON'T THINK EITHER OF US REALLY UNDERSTANDS *HER*.
WHAT'S HE *TALKING* ABOUT?!
I THINK YOU'D BETTER STEP DOWN HERE, FRIEND.
BE MY "FRIEND" THEN --YOU TOLD ME YESTERDAY THAT YOU'D HELP IF I ASKED, SO NOW I'M *ASKING*...
I JUST WANT A FEW MINUTES WITH MY CLIENT.
PAUL...?

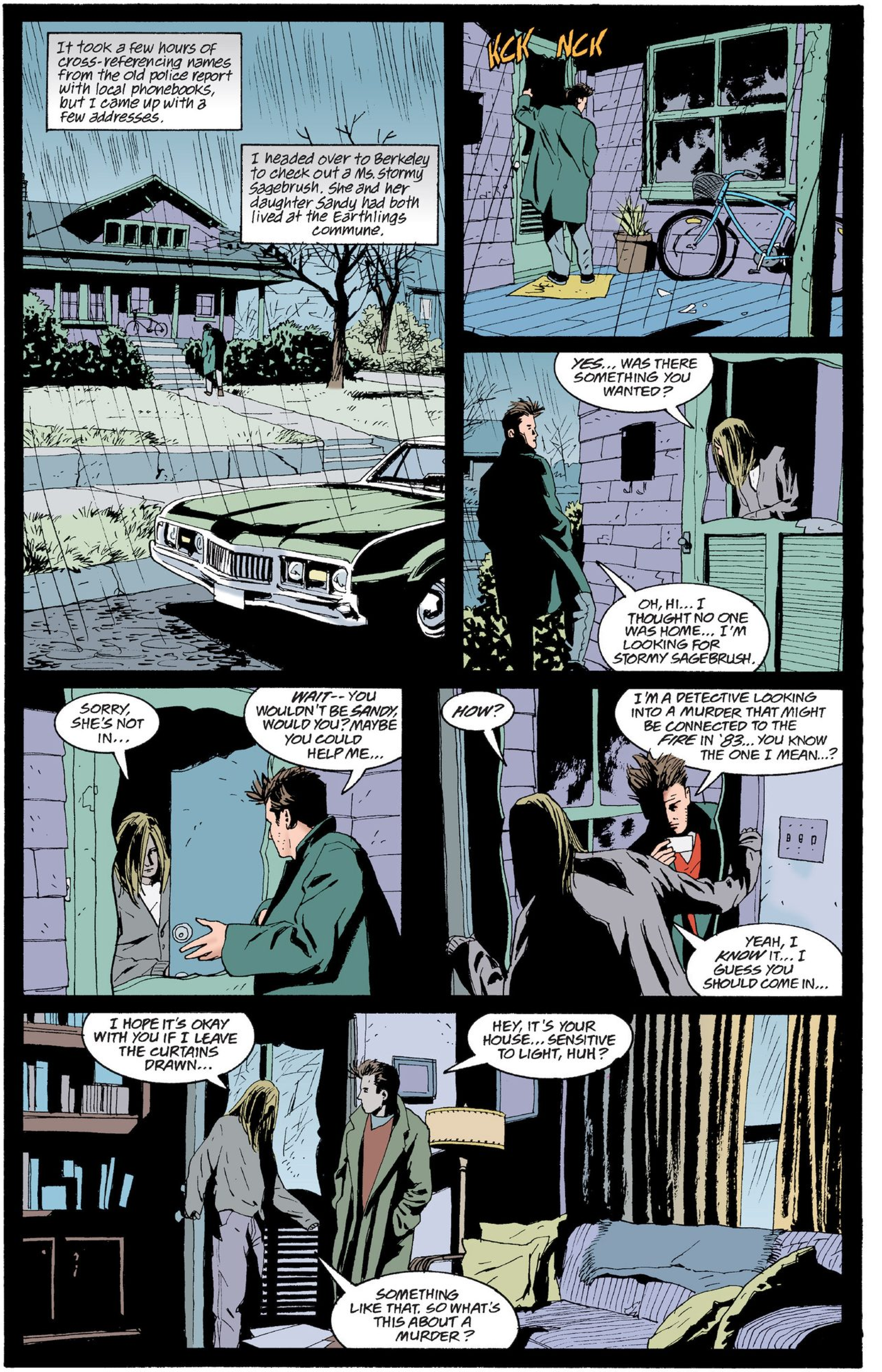

TWO MINUTES. THAT'S IT.
FINE.
I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT YOU--
LEMME *TELL* YOU THEN. I THINK THAT YOU *KNEW* MAGGIE HAD GONE TO STAY AT LUNARHOUSE, AND I THINK YOU MIGHT EVEN HAVE PUT HER *UP* TO IT.
WHY WOULD I HAVE DONE *THAT*?
BECAUSE YOU *BOTH* KNEW THAT MITCHELL LUNA WAS REALLY THE MAN WHO KILLED YOUR FATHER, AND YOU KNEW THAT SECRET WAS WORTH A LOT TO HIM.
I... I DON'T... UH... DON'T...
BUT SOMETHING WENT WRONG, DIDN'T IT? MAGGIE CHANGED HER MIND, OR GOT *SELFISH*-- OR SHE GOT SCARED OF THE WHOLE THING, AND SO SHE SPLIT. *THAT'S* WHY YOU DIDN'T WANNA INVOLVE THE POLICE!
"OH, EXCUSE ME, MY SISTER AND I WERE BLACKMAILING SOMEONE AND SHE SEEMS TO HAVE GONE MISSING."
AND THEN SHE ENDS UP LIKE *THIS*! NOT PART OF THE PLAN, *HUH*?

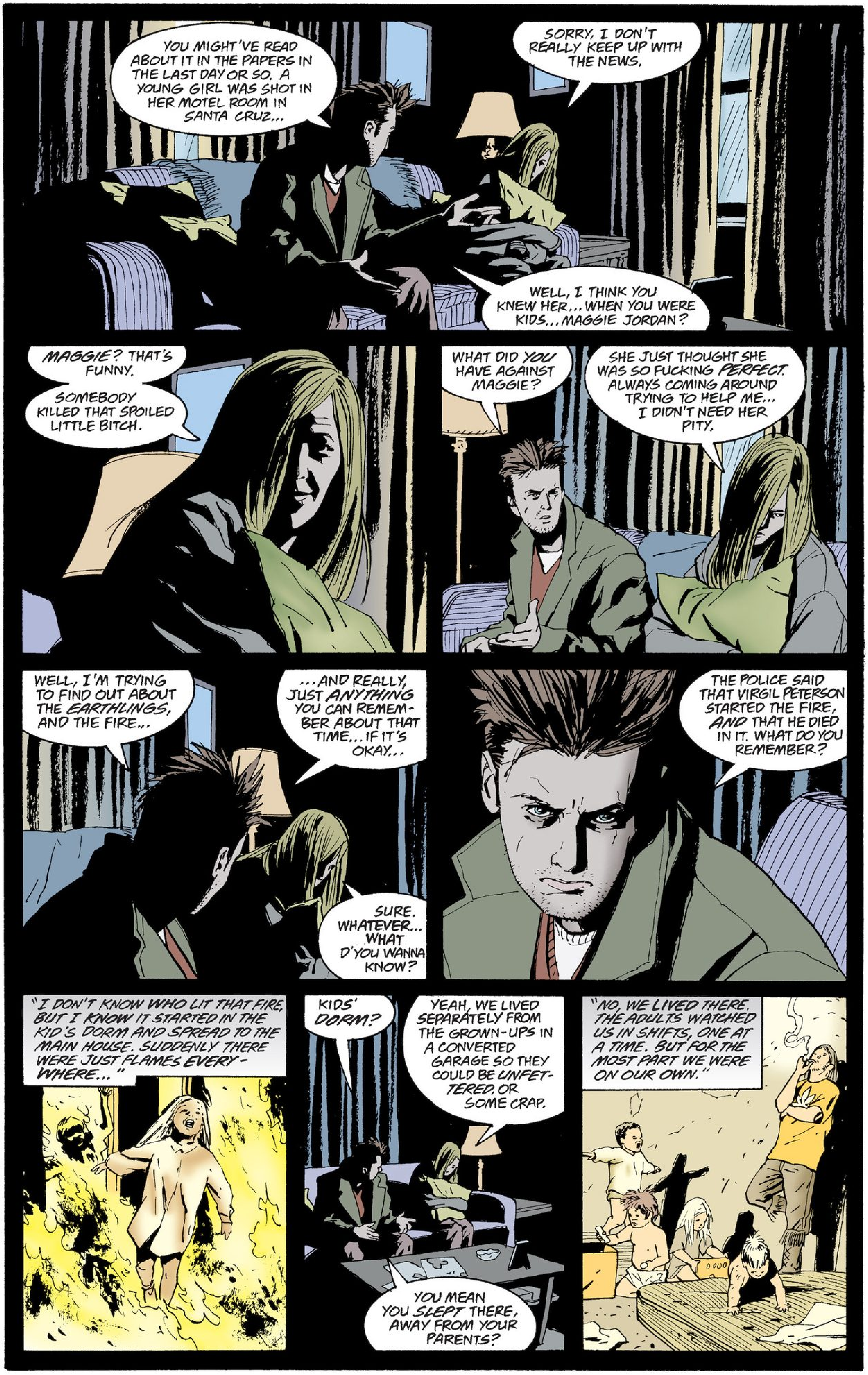

THAT'S *NOT* WHAT *HAPPENED!*
THEN WHAT DID?
WE WEREN'T GOING TO BLACKMAIL HIM, WE WERE GOING TO GET HIM *BACK*... MAGGIE WAS JUST SUPPOSED TO FIND OUT IF HE WAS REALLY VIRGIL, BECAUSE HE MIGHT'VE RECOGNIZED ME.
JESUS...
WE WERE GOING TO TURN HIM IN TO THE *POLICE*... I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO MAGGIE, WHY SHE CHANGED HER MIND... THAT BASTARD HAS A WAY OF GETTING INTO YOUR *HEAD*... TURNING THINGS AROUND...
WE SHOULD HAVE JUST KILLED HIM...

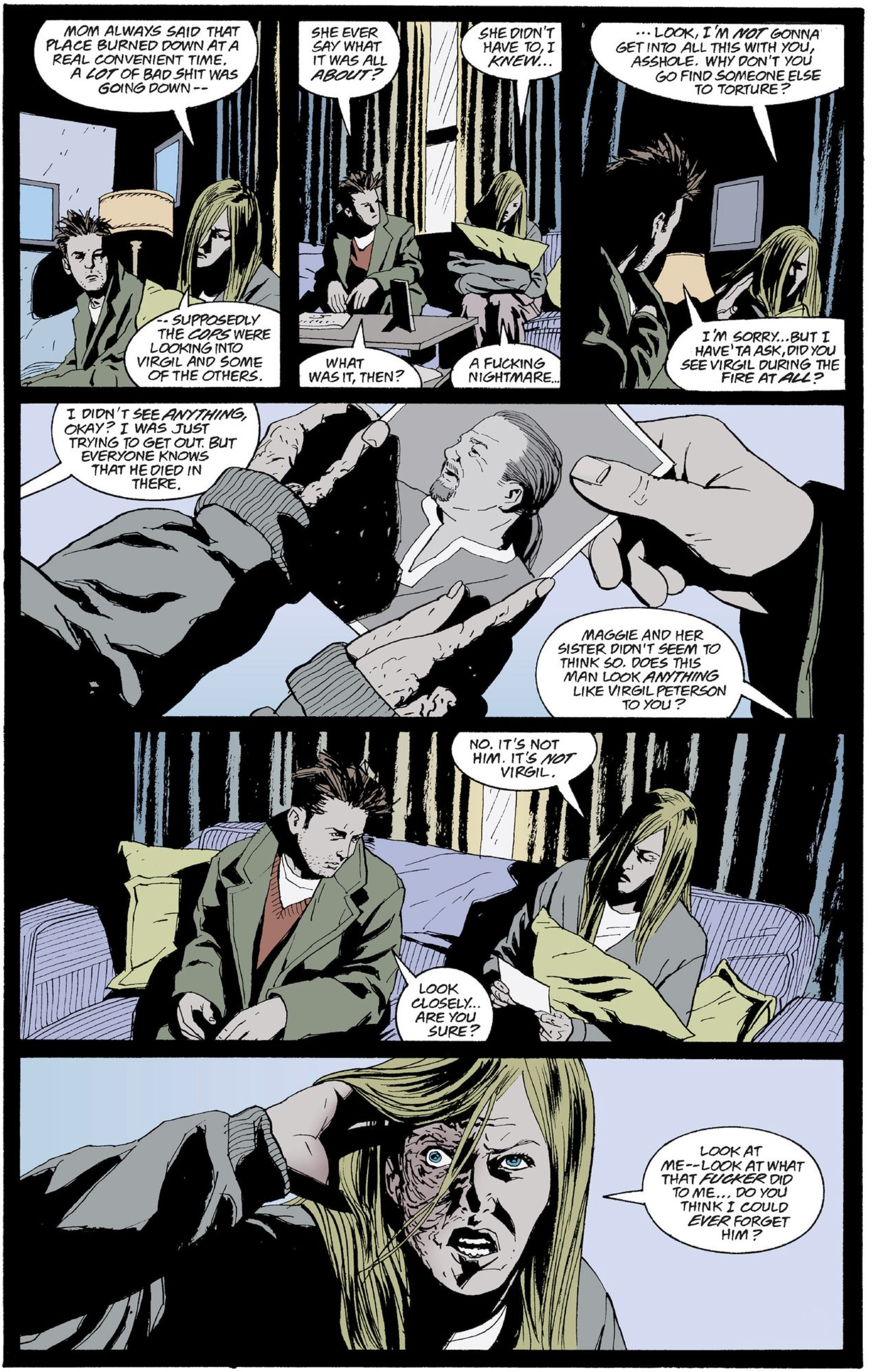
Her hate was a kind I knew well, and there was no amount of rain or tears that would wash it away.

Chapter Thirteen

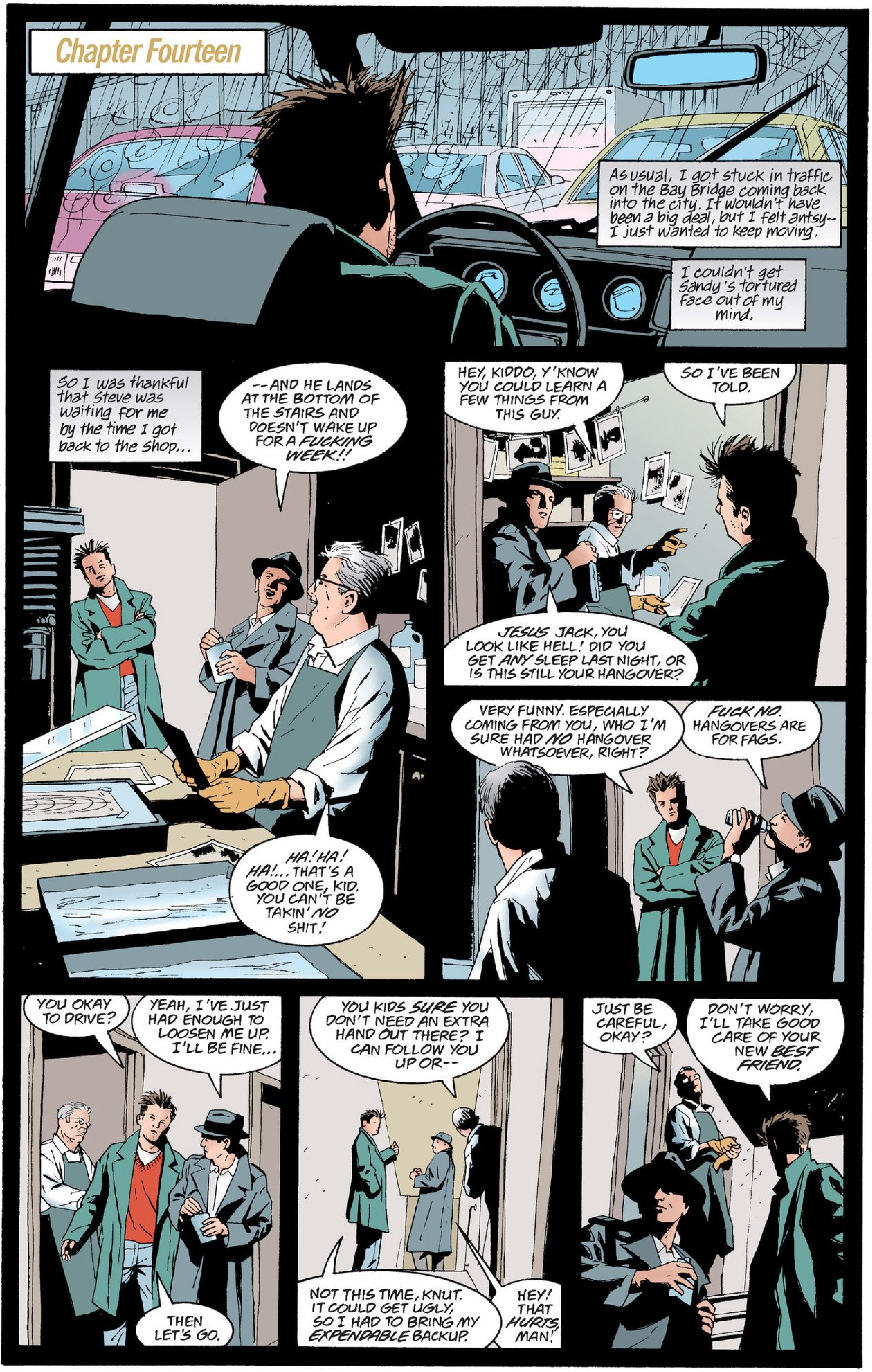

EXIT
I had to meet Steve at about 4:00pm for our trip up to the Lunarhouse compound in Santa Rosa, so I hoped to get some sleep before then.
My talk with Alex had confirmed some of my suspicions, but it had brought up new questions that only Luna could answer. And even with Steve along, I doubted I'd get anything out of Luna.
IS MR. HERRIMAN EVER *ACTUALLY* HERE? I MEAN, IN THE GALLERY?
NOT AS OFTEN AS I'D LIKE, THAT'S FOR SURE...
I JUST GOTTA MEET HIM BEFORE HE *DIES*. HE'S BEEN SUCH A *HUGE* INFLUENCE ON MY *ART*.
WELL, YOU'D BETTER COME BACK *SOON*, IN THAT CASE. YOU NEVER CAN TELL WHEN US OLD FOLKS ARE GONNA *GO*.
CHARMING... REALLY.
WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU GUYS WERE RIGHT ABOUT THE *PETERSON-LUNA* CONNECTION --
-- BUT ALEX CLAIMS THEY WERE JUST GOING TO TURN HIM IN...
AND YOU DON'T QUITE BELIEVE HER? BECAUSE SHE LIED BEFORE?
NO, IT'S NOT JUST THAT... SHE JUST HAS *SO MUCH* HATRED FOR THIS GUY...
AND I STILL DON'T FEEL LIKE I'VE GOT THE WHOLE STORY... WHY DID PETERSON BURN DOWN THE EARTHLINGS COMMUNE?
IF IT WAS AN *ACCIDENT*, WHY WOULD SHE HATE HIM SO MUCH FOR SO LONG... AND IF IT WAS ARSON, LIKE THE POLICE THOUGHT, THEN WHAT WAS THE *MOTIVE*?
SEEMS LIKE THOSE ARE ALL GOOD QUESTIONS TO BE ASKING.
SURE, BUT WHO DO I ASK? ALEX ISN'T EXACTLY FORTHCOMING OR RELIABLE, AND *LUNA* HAS AN ARMED GUARD...
WHY DON'T YOU ASK SOME OF THE OTHER SURVIVORS? SOME OF THEM *MUST* HAVE STAYED IN THE AREA, DON'T YOU THINK?
I GUESS SO... JESUS, WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?

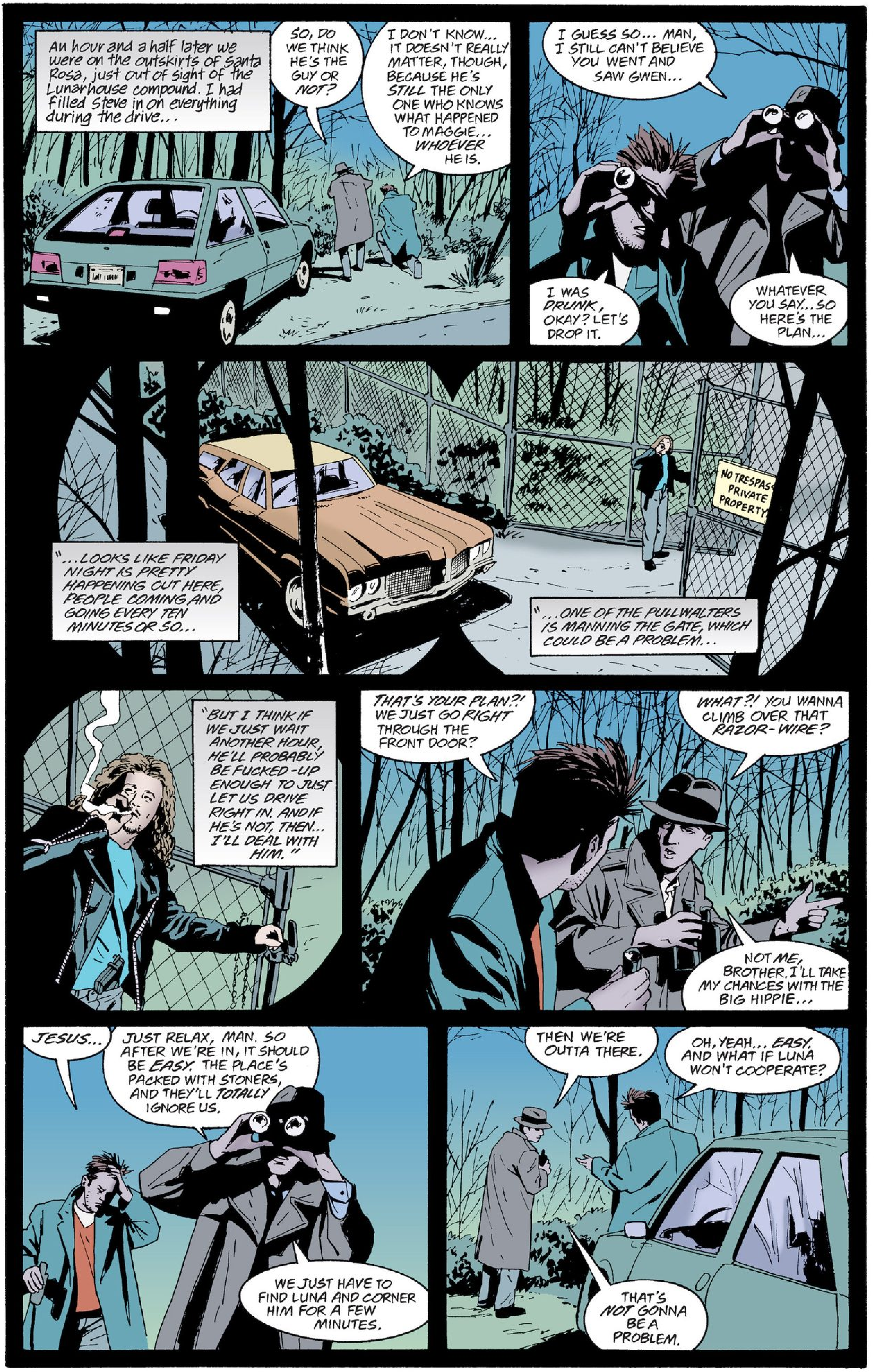

It took a few hours of cross-referencing names from the old police report with local phonebooks, but I came up with a few addresses.
I headed over to Berkeley to check out a Ms. Stormy Sagebrush. She and her daughter Sandy had both lived at the Earthlings commune.
KCK NCK
YES... WAS THERE SOMETHING YOU WANTED?
OH, HI... I THOUGHT NO ONE WAS HOME... I'M LOOKING FOR STORMY SAGEBRUSH.
SORRY, SHE'S NOT IN...
WAIT-- YOU WOULDN'T BE SANDY, WOULD YOU? MAYBE YOU COULD HELP ME...
HOW?
I'M A DETECTIVE LOOKING INTO A MURDER THAT MIGHT BE CONNECTED TO THE FIRE IN '83... YOU KNOW THE ONE I MEAN...?
YEAH, I KNOW IT... I GUESS YOU SHOULD COME IN...
I HOPE IT'S OKAY WITH YOU IF I LEAVE THE CURTAINS DRAWN...
HEY, IT'S YOUR HOUSE... SENSITIVE TO LIGHT, HUH?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT. SO WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A MURDER?

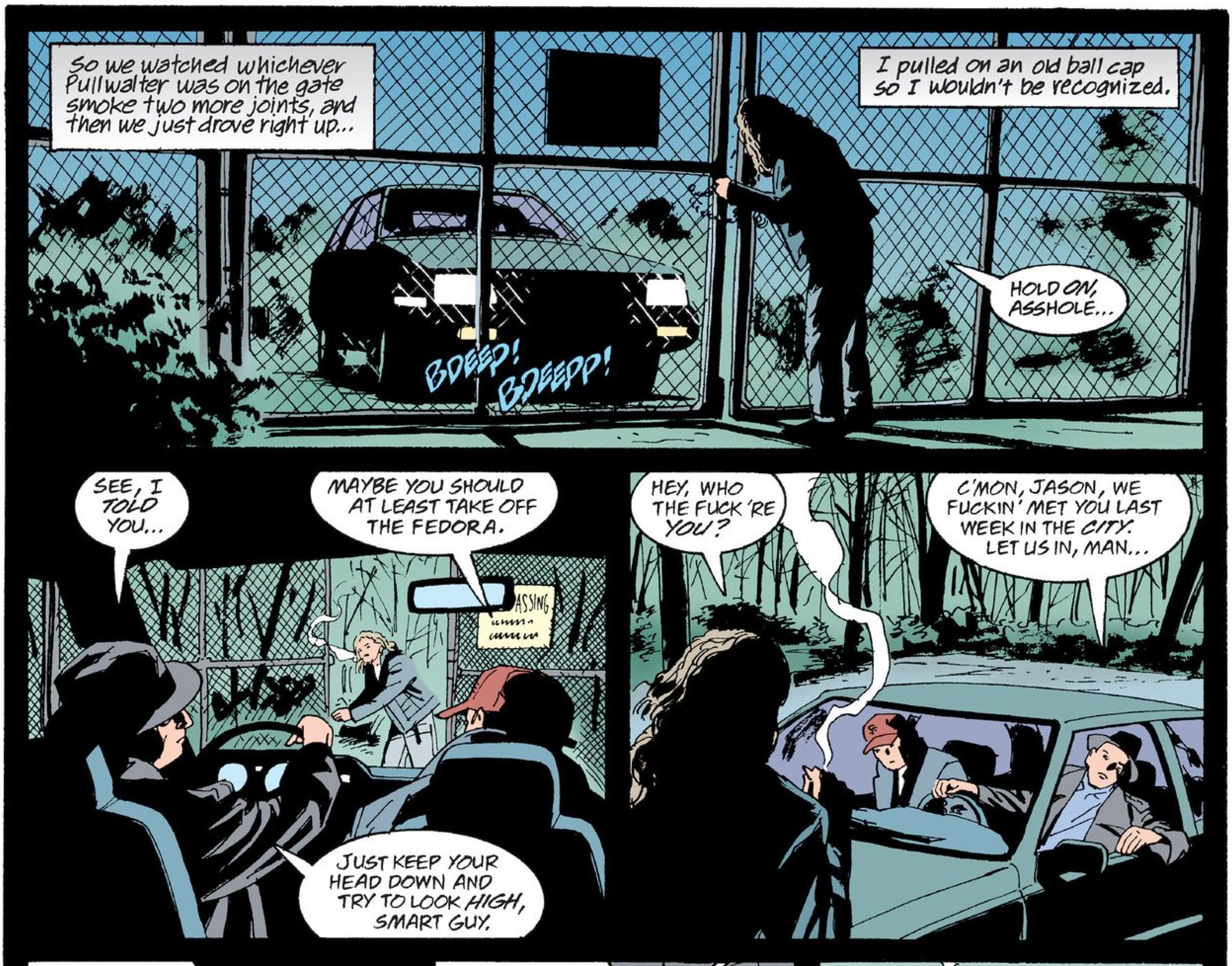

YOU MIGHT'VE READ ABOUT IT IN THE PAPERS IN THE LAST DAY OR SO. A YOUNG GIRL WAS SHOT IN HER MOTEL ROOM IN SANTA CRUZ...
SORRY, I DON'T REALLY KEEP UP WITH THE NEWS.
WELL, I THINK YOU KNEW HER... WHEN YOU WERE KIDS... MAGGIE JORDAN?
MAGGIE? THAT'S FUNNY.
SOMEBODY KILLED THAT SPOILED LITTLE BITCH.
WHAT DID *YOU* HAVE AGAINST MAGGIE?
SHE JUST THOUGHT SHE WAS SO FUCKING *PERFECT*. ALWAYS COMING AROUND TRYING TO HELP ME... I DIDN'T NEED HER PITY.
WELL, I'M TRYING TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE *EARTHLINGS*, AND THE FIRE...
...AND REALLY, JUST *ANYTHING* YOU CAN REMEMBER ABOUT THAT TIME... IF IT'S OKAY...
SURE. WHATEVER... WHAT D'YOU WANNA KNOW?
THE POLICE SAID THAT VIRGIL PETERSON STARTED THE FIRE, *AND* THAT HE DIED IN IT. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?
"I DON'T KNOW *WHO* LIT THAT FIRE, BUT I *KNOW* IT STARTED IN THE KID'S DORM AND SPREAD TO THE MAIN HOUSE. SUDDENLY THERE WERE JUST FLAMES *EVERYWHERE*..."
KIDS' *DORM?*
YEAH, WE LIVED SEPARATELY FROM THE GROWN-UPS IN A CONVERTED GARAGE SO THEY COULD BE *UNFETTERED*, OR SOME CRAP.
YOU MEAN YOU *SLEPT* THERE, AWAY FROM YOUR PARENTS?
"NO, WE *LIVED* THERE. THE ADULTS WATCHED US IN SHIFTS, ONE AT A TIME. BUT FOR THE MOST PART WE WERE ON OUR OWN."

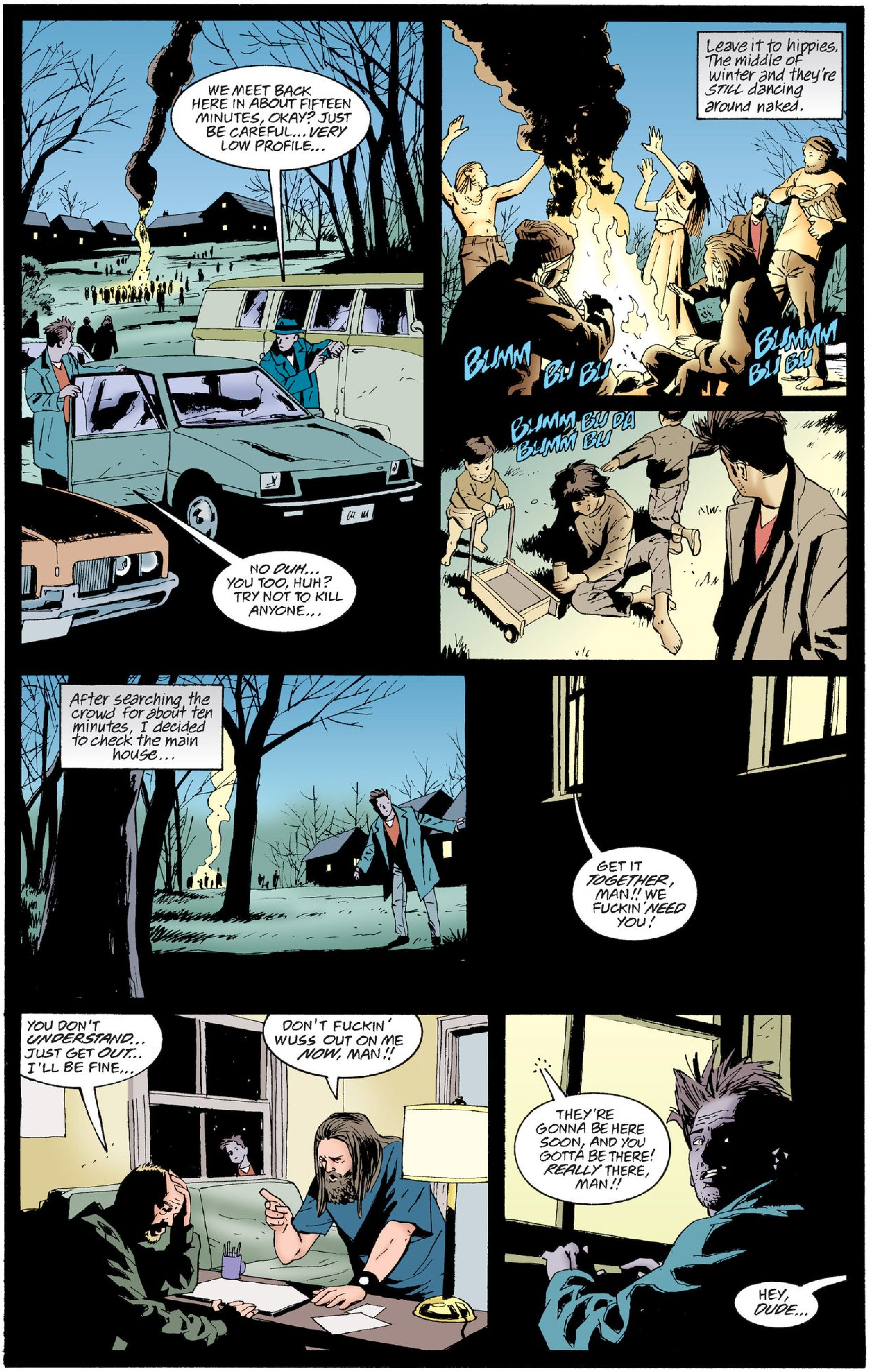

MOM ALWAYS SAID THAT PLACE BURNED DOWN AT A REAL CONVENIENT TIME. A LOT OF BAD SHIT WAS GOING DOWN --
-- SUPPOSEDLY THE COPS WERE LOOKING INTO VIRGIL AND SOME OF THE OTHERS.
SHE EVER SAY WHAT IT WAS ALL ABOUT?
SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO, I KNEW...
WHAT WAS IT, THEN?
A FUCKING NIGHTMARE...
... LOOK, I'M NOT GONNA GET INTO ALL THIS WITH YOU, ASSHOLE. WHY DON'T YOU GO FIND SOMEONE ELSE TO TORTURE?
I'M SORRY... BUT I HAVE'TA ASK, DID YOU SEE VIRGIL DURING THE FIRE AT ALL?
I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING, OKAY? I WAS JUST TRYING TO GET OUT. BUT EVERYONE KNOWS THAT HE DIED IN THERE.
MAGGIE AND HER SISTER DIDN'T SEEM TO THINK SO. DOES THIS MAN LOOK ANYTHING LIKE VIRGIL PETERSON TO YOU?
NO. IT'S NOT HIM. IT'S NOT VIRGIL.
LOOK CLOSELY... ARE YOU SURE?
LOOK AT ME--LOOK AT WHAT THAT FUCKER DID TO ME... DO YOU THINK I COULD EVER FORGET HIM?

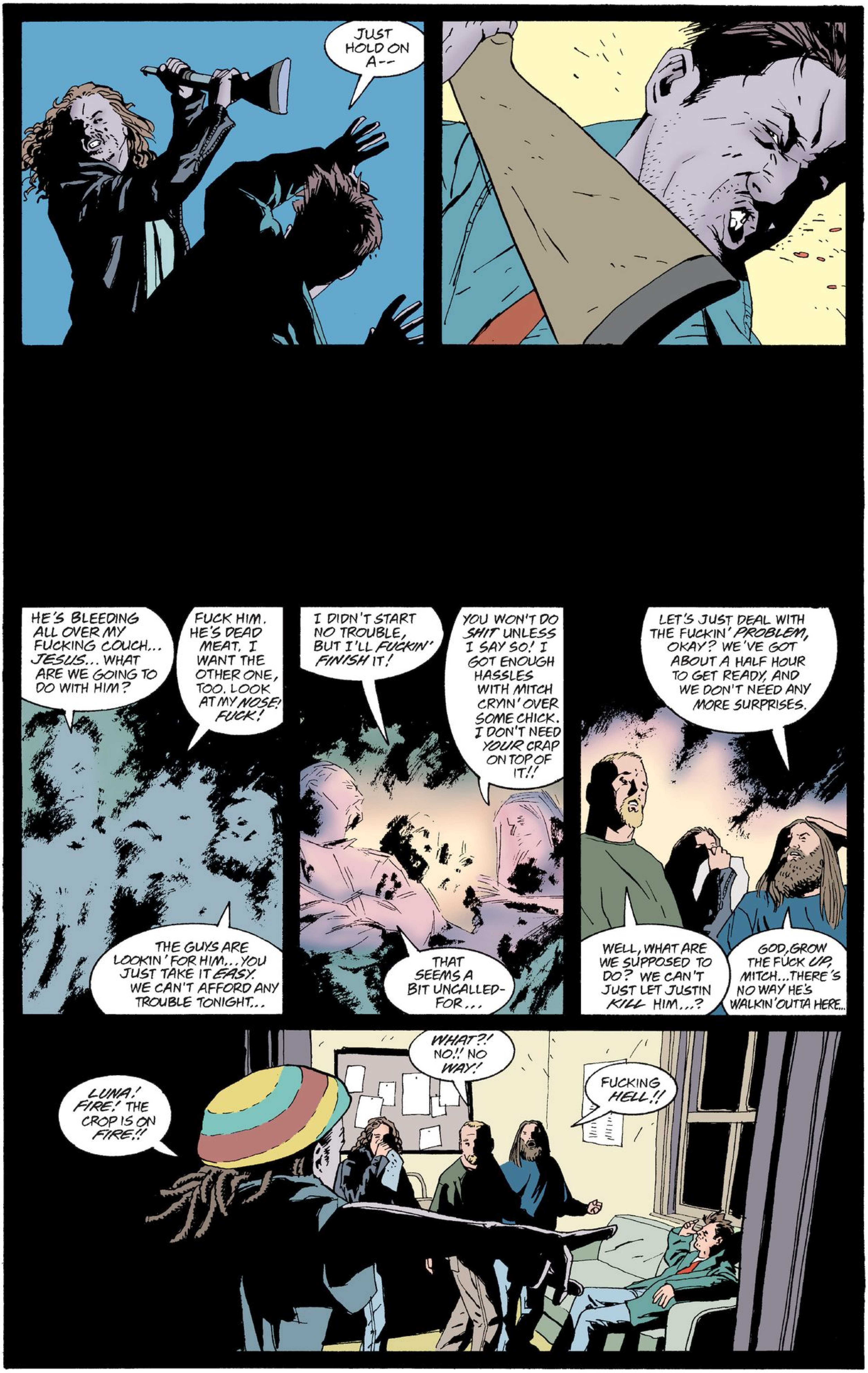
Chapter Fourteen

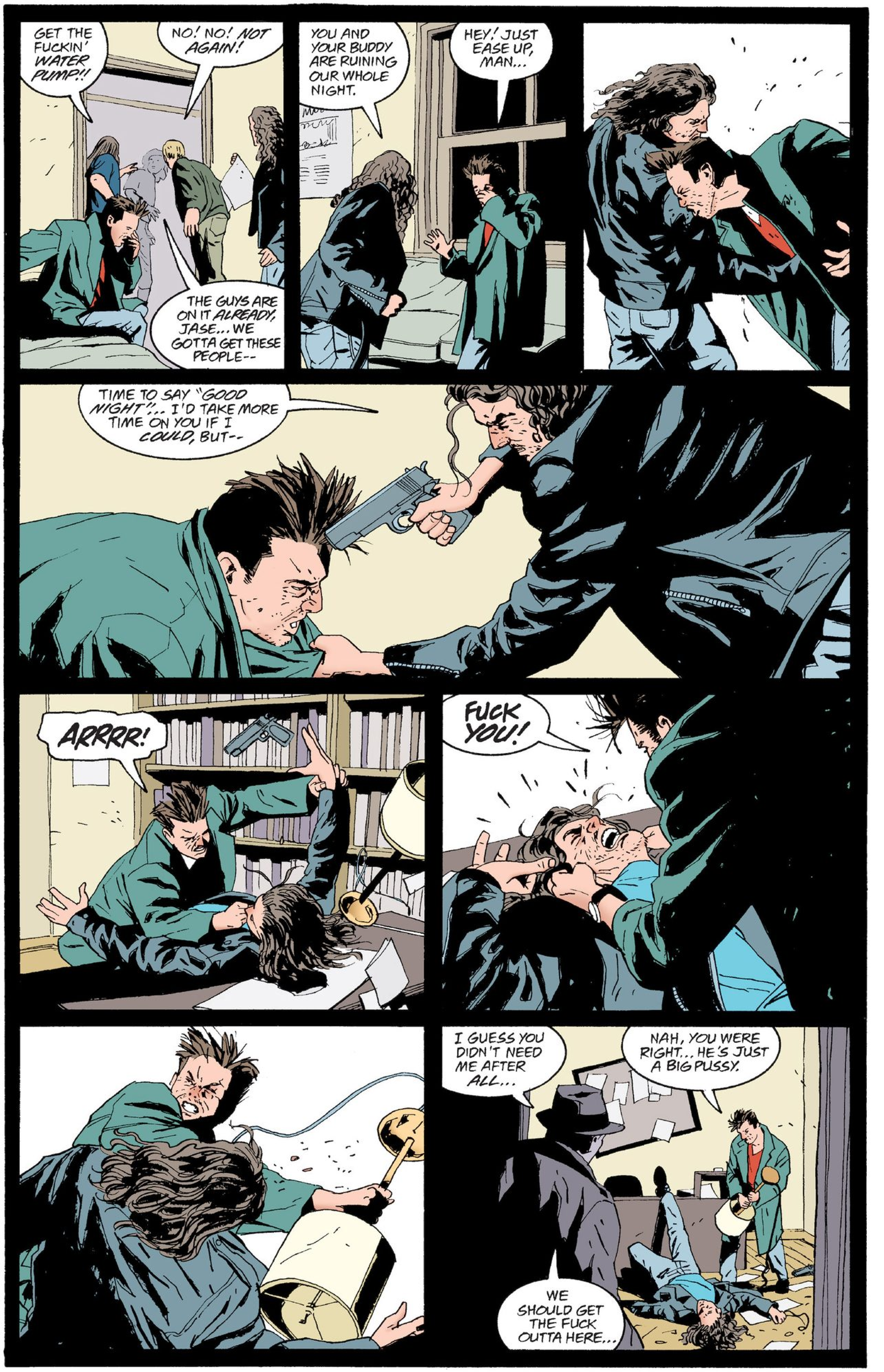

As usual, I got stuck in traffic on the Bay Bridge coming back into the city. It wouldn't have been a big deal, but I felt antsy-- I just wanted to keep moving.
I couldn't get Sandy's tortured face out of my mind.
So I was thankful that Steve was waiting for me by the time I got back to the shop...
--AND HE LANDS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS AND DOESN'T WAKE UP FOR A *FUCKING WEEK!!*
HA! HA! HA!... THAT'S A GOOD ONE, KID. YOU CAN'T BE TAKIN' *NO* SHIT!
HEY, KIDDO, Y'KNOW YOU COULD LEARN A FEW THINGS FROM THIS GUY.
SO I'VE BEEN TOLD.
JESUS JACK, YOU LOOK LIKE HELL! DID YOU GET *ANY* SLEEP LAST NIGHT, OR IS THIS STILL YOUR HANGOVER?
VERY FUNNY. ESPECIALLY COMING FROM YOU, WHO I'M SURE HAD *NO* HANGOVER WHATSOEVER, RIGHT?
FUCK NO. HANGOVERS ARE FOR FAGS.
YOU OKAY TO DRIVE?
YEAH, I'VE JUST HAD ENOUGH TO LOOSEN ME UP. I'LL BE FINE...
THEN LET'S GO.
YOU KIDS *SURE* YOU DON'T NEED AN EXTRA HAND OUT THERE? I CAN FOLLOW YOU UP OR--
NOT THIS TIME, KNUT. IT COULD GET UGLY, SO I HAD TO BRING MY *EXPENDABLE* BACKUP.
HEY! THAT *HURTS*, MAN!
JUST BE CAREFUL, OKAY?
DON'T WORRY, I'LL TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR NEW *BEST FRIEND.*

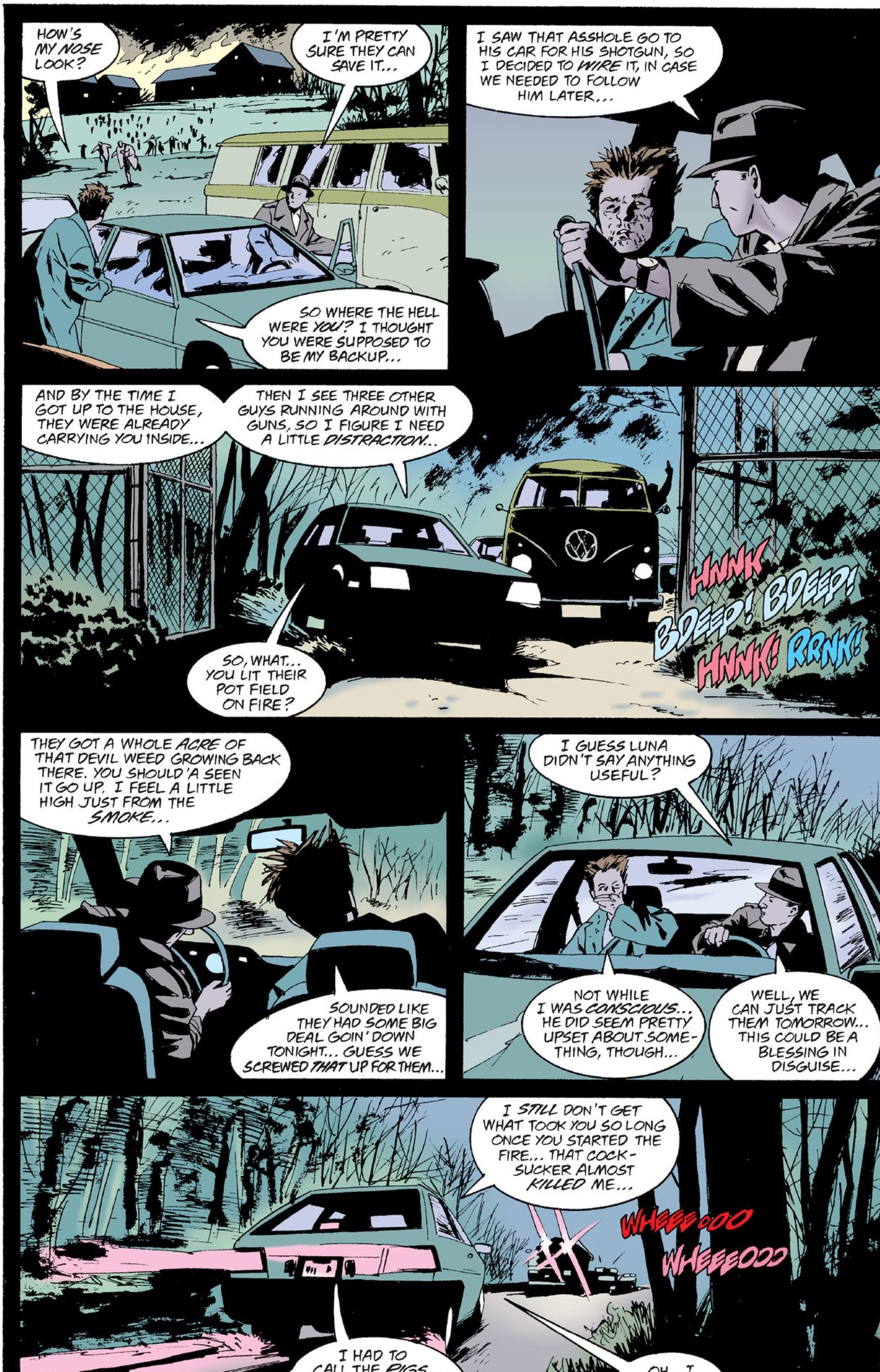

An hour and a half later we were on the outskirts of Santa Rosa, just out of sight of the Lunarhouse compound. I had filled Steve in on everything during the drive...
SO, DO WE THINK HE'S THE GUY OR NOT?
I DON'T KNOW... IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER, THOUGH, BECAUSE HE'S STILL THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO MAGGIE... WHOEVER HE IS.
I GUESS SO... MAN, I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WENT AND SAW GWEN...
I WAS DRUNK, OKAY? LET'S DROP IT.
WHATEVER YOU SAY... SO HERE'S THE PLAN...
NO TRESPASS PRIVATE PROPERTY
"...LOOKS LIKE FRIDAY NIGHT IS PRETTY HAPPENING OUT HERE, PEOPLE COMING AND GOING EVERY TEN MINUTES OR SO...
"...ONE OF THE PULLWALTERS IS MANNING THE GATE, WHICH COULD BE A PROBLEM...
"BUT I THINK IF WE JUST WAIT ANOTHER HOUR, HE'LL PROBABLY BE FUCKED-UP ENOUGH TO JUST LET US DRIVE RIGHT IN. AND IF HE'S NOT, THEN... I'LL DEAL WITH HIM."
THAT'S YOUR PLAN?! WE JUST GO RIGHT THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR?
WHAT?! YOU WANNA CLIMB OVER THAT RAZOR-WIRE?
NOT ME, BROTHER. I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES WITH THE BIG HIPPIE...
JESUS...
JUST RELAX, MAN. SO AFTER WE'RE IN, IT SHOULD BE EASY. THE PLACE'S PACKED WITH STONERS, AND THEY'LL TOTALLY IGNORE US.
WE JUST HAVE TO FIND LUNA AND CORNER HIM FOR A FEW MINUTES.
THEN WE'RE OUTTA THERE.
OH, YEAH... EASY. AND WHAT IF LUNA WON'T COOPERATE?
THAT'S NOT GONNA BE A PROBLEM.


So we watched whichever Pullwalter was on the gate smoke two more joints, and then we just drove right up...
I pulled on an old ball cap so I wouldn't be recognized.
BDEEP! BDEEPP!
HOLD ON, ASSHOLE...
SEE, I TOLD YOU...
MAYBE YOU SHOULD AT LEAST TAKE OFF THE FEDORA.
JUST KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN AND TRY TO LOOK HIGH, SMART GUY.
HEY, WHO THE FUCK 'RE YOU?
C'MON, JASON, WE FUCKIN' MET YOU LAST WEEK IN THE CITY. LET US IN, MAN...
I'M JUSTIN, ASSHOLE.
NOW GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!
HEY, C'MON MAN... IT'S NOT LIKE YOU GUYS DON'T LOOK ALIKE OR NOTHIN'...
JESUS FUCKING CHRIST, IS HE DEAD?
NAH, HE'S JUST A BIG PUSSY IS ALL. FUCKING ONE SHOT AND HE'S OUT... GOD...
I TOLD YOU TO GET RID OF THE HAT.
YEAH YEAH... HERE, HELP ME DUMP HIM IN THOSE BUSHES.

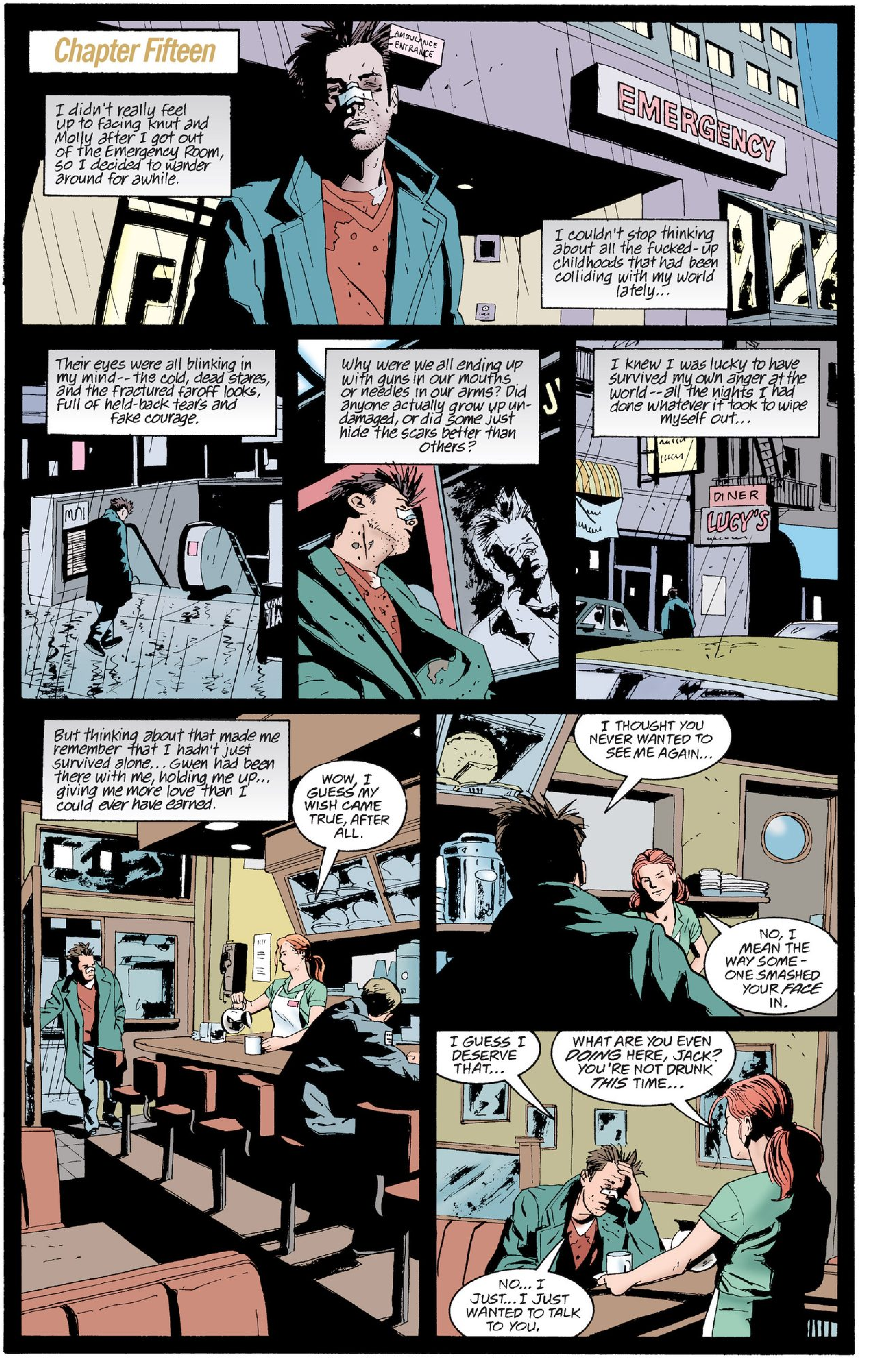

WE MEET BACK HERE IN ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES, OKAY? JUST BE CAREFUL... *VERY* LOW PROFILE...
NO *DUH*... YOU TOO, HUH? TRY NOT TO KILL ANYONE...
Leave it to hippies. The middle of winter and they're *STILL* dancing around naked.
BUMM BU BU
BUMMM BU BU
BUMM BU DA BUMM BU
After searching the crowd for about ten minutes, I decided to check the main house...
GET IT *TOGETHER*, MAN!! WE FUCKIN' *NEED* YOU!
YOU DON'T *UNDERSTAND*... JUST GET *OUT*... I'LL BE FINE...
DON'T FUCKIN' WUSS OUT ON ME *NOW*, MAN!!
THEY'RE GONNA BE HERE SOON, AND YOU GOTTA BE THERE! *REALLY* THERE, MAN!!
HEY, *DUDE*...

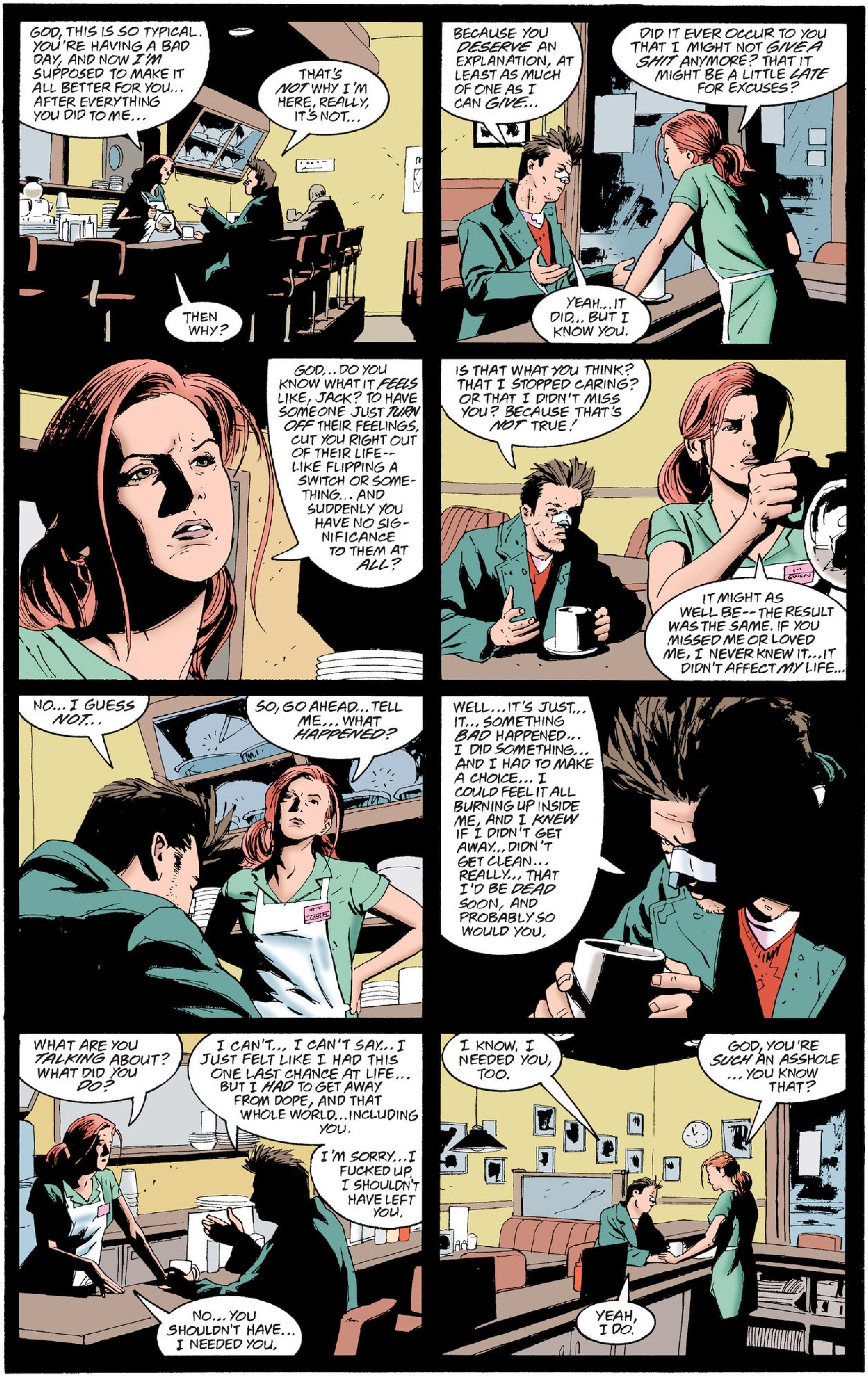

JUST HOLD ON A--
HE'S BLEEDING ALL OVER MY FUCKING COUCH... *JESUS*... WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH HIM?
FUCK HIM. HE'S DEAD MEAT. I WANT THE OTHER ONE, TOO. LOOK AT MY *NOSE*! *FUCK*!
THE GUYS ARE LOOKIN' FOR HIM... YOU JUST TAKE IT *EASY*. WE CAN'T AFFORD ANY TROUBLE TONIGHT...
I DIDN'T START NO TROUBLE, BUT I'LL *FUCKIN' FINISH* IT!
YOU WON'T DO *SHIT* UNLESS I SAY SO! I GOT ENOUGH HASSLES WITH MITCH CRYIN' OVER SOME CHICK. I DON'T NEED *YOUR* CRAP ON TOP OF IT!!
THAT SEEMS A BIT UNCALLED-FOR...
LET'S JUST DEAL WITH THE FUCKIN' *PROBLEM*, OKAY? WE'VE GOT ABOUT A HALF HOUR TO GET READY, AND WE DON'T NEED ANY MORE SURPRISES.
WELL, WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO? WE CAN'T JUST LET JUSTIN *KILL* HIM...?
GOD, GROW THE FUCK *UP*, MITCH... THERE'S NO WAY HE'S WALKIN' OUTTA HERE...
LUNA! FIRE! THE CROP IS ON *FIRE!!*
WHAT?! NO!! NO *WAY*!
FUCKING *HELL!!*


GET THE FUCKIN' WATER PUMP!!
NO! NO! NOT AGAIN!
THE GUYS ARE ON IT ALREADY, JASE... WE GOTTA GET THESE PEOPLE--
YOU AND YOUR BUDDY ARE RUINING OUR WHOLE NIGHT.
HEY! JUST EASE UP, MAN...
TIME TO SAY "GOOD NIGHT"... I'D TAKE MORE TIME ON YOU IF I COULD, BUT--
ARRRR!
FUCK YOU!
I GUESS YOU DIDN'T NEED ME AFTER ALL...
NAH, YOU WERE RIGHT... HE'S JUST A BIG PUSSY.
WE SHOULD GET THE FUCK OUTTA HERE...

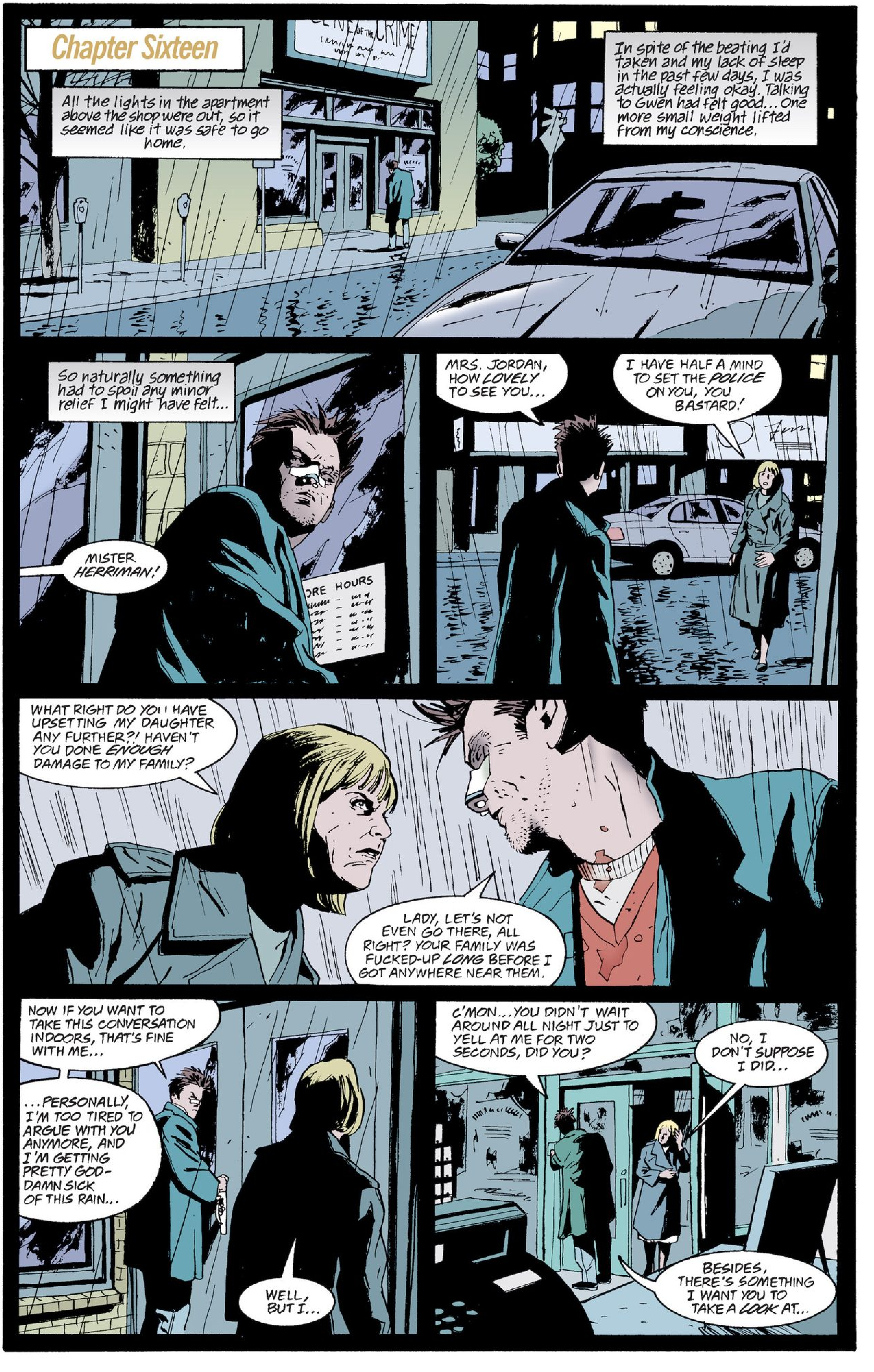

HOW'S MY *NOSE* LOOK?
I'M PRETTY SURE THEY CAN SAVE IT...
SO WHERE THE HELL WERE *YOU*? I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE MY BACKUP...
I SAW THAT ASSHOLE GO TO HIS CAR FOR HIS SHOTGUN, SO I DECIDED TO *WIRE* IT, IN CASE WE NEEDED TO FOLLOW HIM LATER...
AND BY THE TIME I GOT UP TO THE HOUSE, THEY WERE ALREADY CARRYING YOU INSIDE...
THEN I SEE THREE OTHER GUYS RUNNING AROUND WITH GUNS, SO I FIGURE I NEED A LITTLE *DISTRACTION*...
SO, WHAT... YOU LIT THEIR POT FIELD ON FIRE?
HNNK
BDEEP! BDEEP!
HNNK! RRNK!
THEY GOT A WHOLE *ACRE* OF THAT DEVIL WEED GROWING BACK THERE. YOU SHOULD'A SEEN IT GO UP. I FEEL A LITTLE HIGH JUST FROM THE *SMOKE*...
SOUNDED LIKE THEY HAD SOME BIG DEAL GOIN' DOWN TONIGHT... GUESS WE SCREWED *THAT* UP FOR THEM...
I GUESS LUNA DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING USEFUL?
NOT WHILE I WAS *CONSCIOUS*... HE DID SEEM PRETTY UPSET ABOUT SOMETHING, THOUGH...
WELL, WE CAN JUST TRACK THEM TOMORROW... THIS COULD BE A BLESSING IN DISGUISE...
I *STILL* DON'T GET WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG ONCE YOU STARTED THE FIRE... THAT COCKSUCKER ALMOST *KILLED* ME...
WHEEEOOO
WHEEEOOO
I HAD TO CALL THE *PIGS*... JUST TO MAKE SURE MY DIVERSION WAS BIG ENOUGH...
OH... I GUESS IT'S OKAY, THEN...

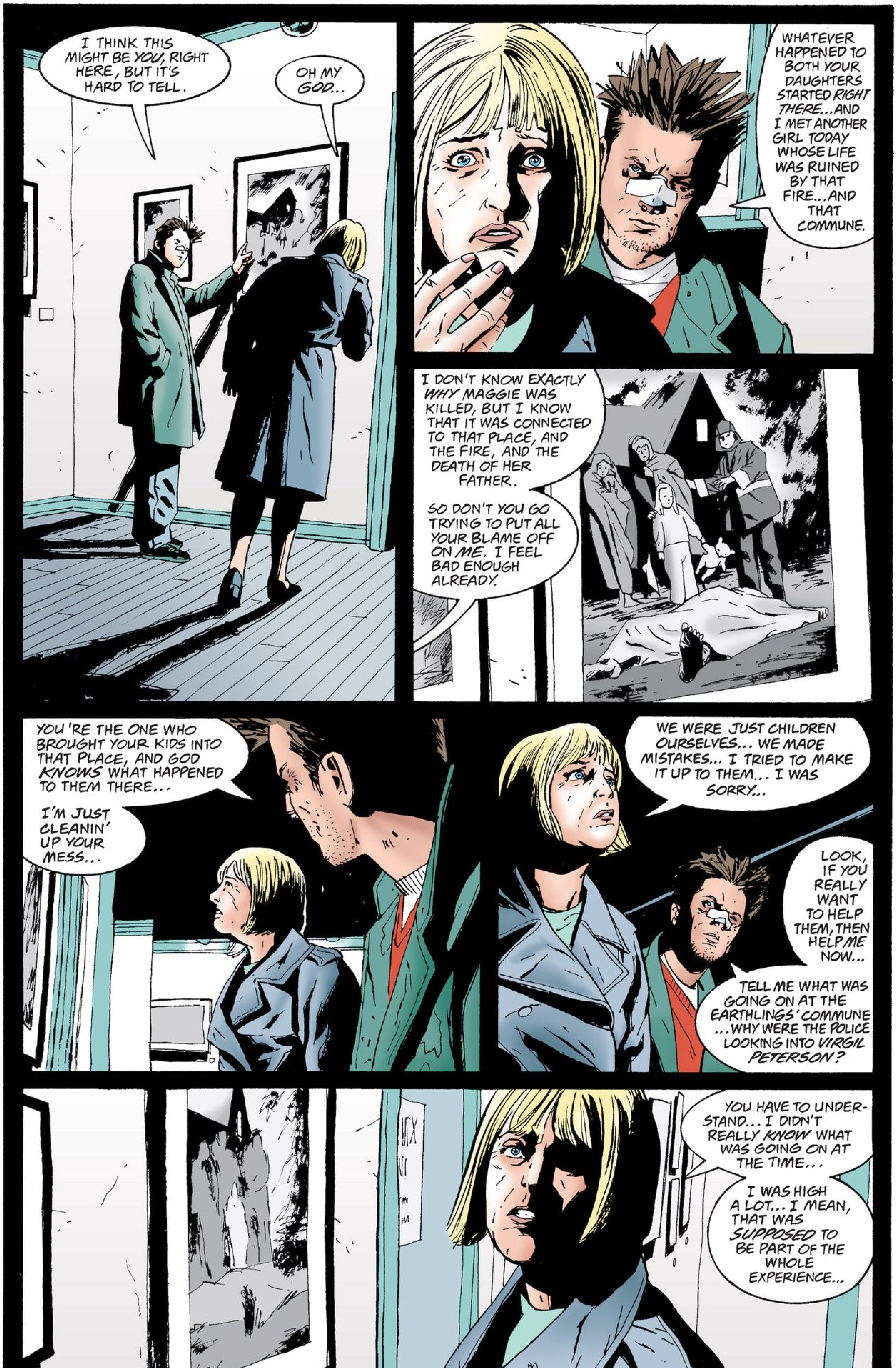
Chapter Fifteen

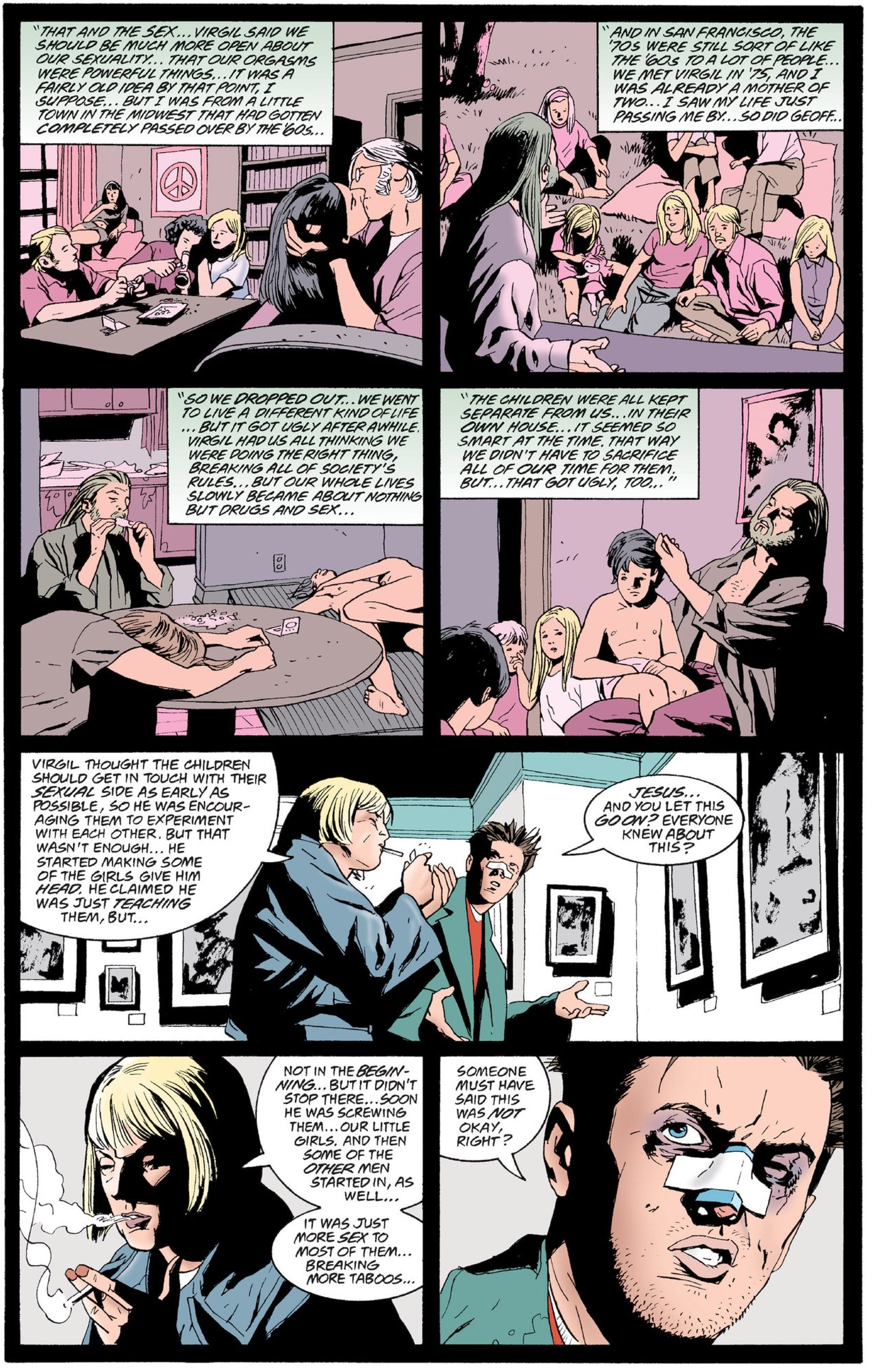

AMBULANCE ENTRANCE
EMERGENCY
I didn't really feel up to facing Knut and Molly after I got out of the Emergency Room, so I decided to wander around for awhile.
I couldn't stop thinking about all the fucked-up childhoods that had been colliding with my world lately...
Their eyes were all blinking in my mind--the cold, dead stares, and the fractured faroff looks, full of held-back tears and fake courage.
MUNI
Why were we all ending up with guns in our mouths or needles in our arms? Did anyone actually grow up undamaged, or did some just hide the scars better than others?
I knew I was lucky to have survived my own anger at the world--all the nights I had done whatever it took to wipe myself out...
DINER
LUCY'S
But thinking about that made me remember that I hadn't just survived alone... Gwen had been there with me, holding me up... giving me more love than I could ever have earned.
WOW, I GUESS MY WISH CAME TRUE, AFTER ALL.
I THOUGHT YOU NEVER WANTED TO SEE ME AGAIN...
NO, I MEAN THE WAY SOMEONE SMASHED YOUR *FACE* IN.
I GUESS I DESERVE THAT...
WHAT ARE YOU EVEN *DOING* HERE, JACK? YOU'RE NOT DRUNK *THIS* TIME...
NO... I JUST... I JUST WANTED TO TALK TO YOU.

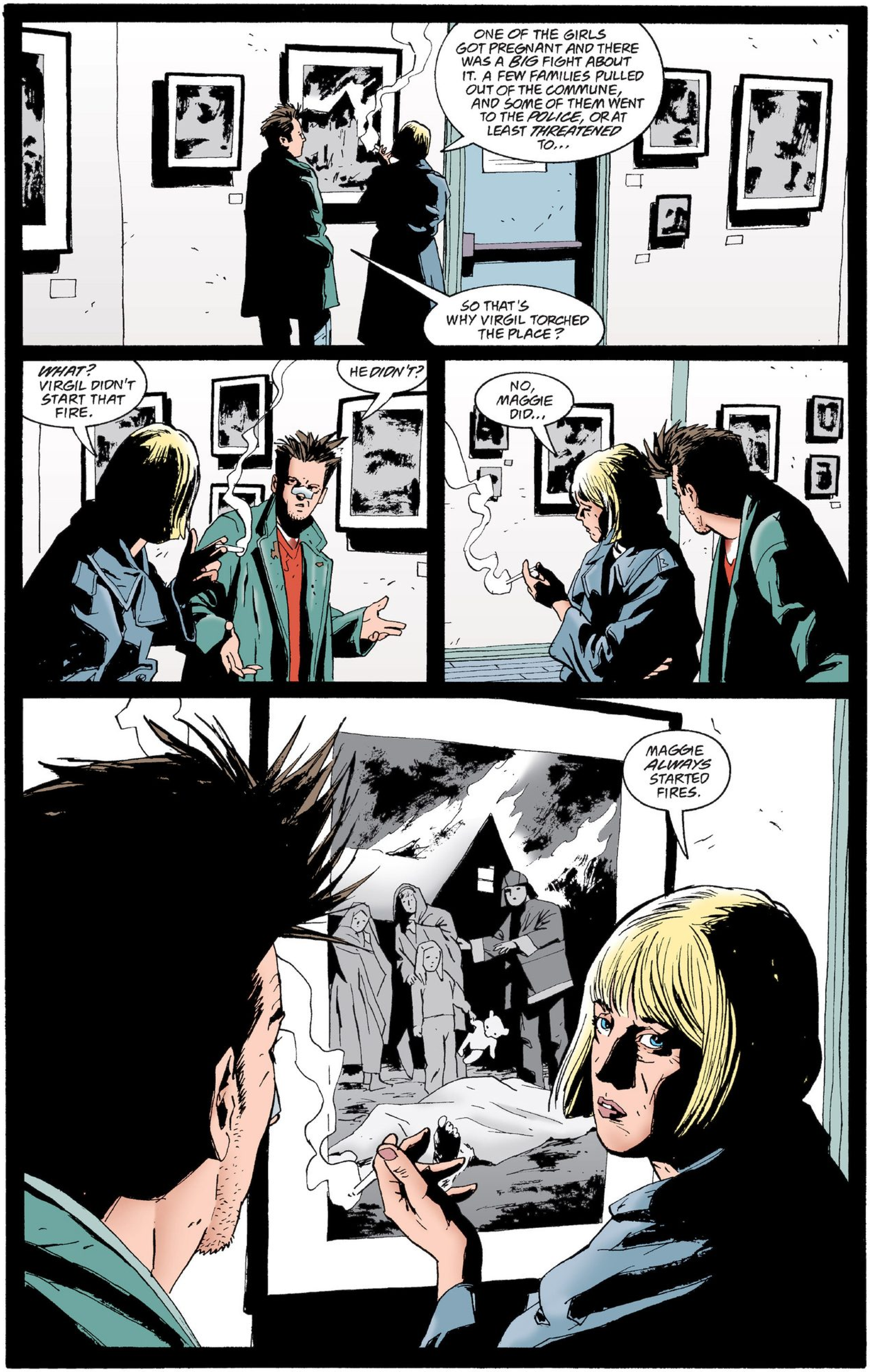

GOD, THIS IS SO TYPICAL. YOU'RE HAVING A BAD DAY, AND NOW *I'M* SUPPOSED TO MAKE IT ALL BETTER FOR YOU... AFTER EVERYTHING YOU DID TO ME...
THAT'S *NOT* WHY I'M HERE, REALLY, IT'S NOT...
THEN WHY?
BECAUSE YOU *DESERVE* AN EXPLANATION, AT LEAST AS MUCH OF ONE AS I CAN *GIVE*...
DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU THAT I MIGHT NOT *GIVE A SHIT* ANYMORE? THAT IT MIGHT BE A LITTLE *LATE* FOR EXCUSES?
YEAH... IT DID... BUT I KNOW YOU.
GOD... DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT *FEELS* LIKE, JACK? TO HAVE SOMEONE JUST *TURN OFF* THEIR FEELINGS, CUT YOU RIGHT OUT OF THEIR LIFE-- LIKE FLIPPING A SWITCH OR SOMETHING... AND SUDDENLY YOU HAVE NO SIGNIFICANCE TO THEM AT *ALL*?
IS THAT WHAT *YOU* THINK? THAT I STOPPED CARING? OR THAT I DIDN'T MISS YOU? BECAUSE THAT'S *NOT* TRUE!
IT MIGHT AS WELL BE-- THE RESULT WAS THE SAME. IF YOU MISSED ME OR LOVED ME, I NEVER KNEW IT... IT DIDN'T AFFECT *MY* LIFE...
NO... I GUESS *NOT*...
SO, GO AHEAD... TELL ME... WHAT *HAPPENED*?
WELL... IT'S JUST... IT... SOMETHING *BAD* HAPPENED... I DID SOMETHING... AND I HAD TO MAKE A CHOICE... I COULD FEEL IT ALL BURNING UP INSIDE ME, AND I *KNEW* IF I DIDN'T GET AWAY... DIDN'T GET CLEAN... REALLY... THAT I'D BE *DEAD* SOON, AND PROBABLY SO WOULD YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? WHAT DID YOU *DO*?
I CAN'T... I CAN'T SAY... I JUST FELT LIKE I HAD THIS ONE LAST CHANCE AT LIFE... BUT I *HAD* TO GET AWAY FROM DOPE, AND THAT WHOLE WORLD... INCLUDING YOU.
I'M SORRY... I FUCKED UP. I SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT YOU.
NO... YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE... I NEEDED YOU.
I KNOW. I NEEDED YOU, TOO.
GOD, YOU'RE *SUCH* AN ASSHOLE... YOU KNOW THAT?
YEAH, I DO.

Chapter Sixteen

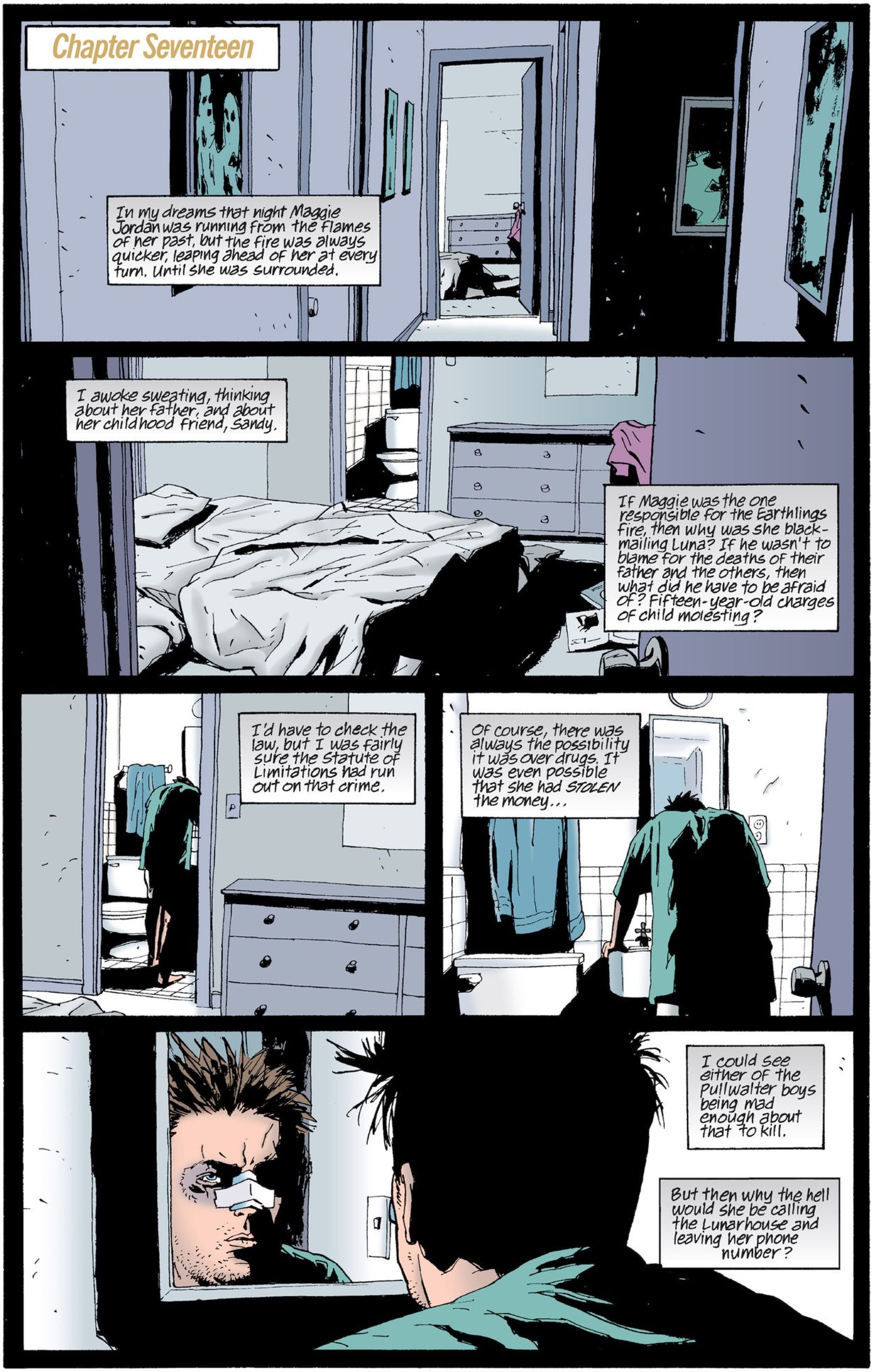

All the lights in the apartment above the shop were out, so it seemed like it was safe to go home.
In spite of the beating I'd taken and my lack of sleep in the past few days, I was actually feeling okay. Talking to Gwen had felt good... One more small weight lifted from my conscience.
So naturally something had to spoil any minor relief I might have felt...
MISTER HERRIMAN!
STORE HOURS
MRS. JORDAN, HOW LOVELY TO SEE YOU...
I HAVE HALF A MIND TO SET THE POLICE ON YOU, YOU BASTARD!
WHAT RIGHT DO YOU HAVE UPSETTING MY DAUGHTER ANY FURTHER?! HAVEN'T YOU DONE ENOUGH DAMAGE TO MY FAMILY?
LADY, LET'S NOT EVEN GO THERE, ALL RIGHT? YOUR FAMILY WAS FUCKED-UP LONG BEFORE I GOT ANYWHERE NEAR THEM.
NOW IF YOU WANT TO TAKE THIS CONVERSATION INDOORS, THAT'S FINE WITH ME...
...PERSONALLY, I'M TOO TIRED TO ARGUE WITH YOU ANYMORE, AND I'M GETTING PRETTY GOD-DAMN SICK OF THIS RAIN...
WELL, BUT I...
C'MON... YOU DIDN'T WAIT AROUND ALL NIGHT JUST TO YELL AT ME FOR TWO SECONDS, DID YOU?
NO, I DON'T SUPPOSE I DID...
BESIDES, THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT YOU TO TAKE A LOOK AT...

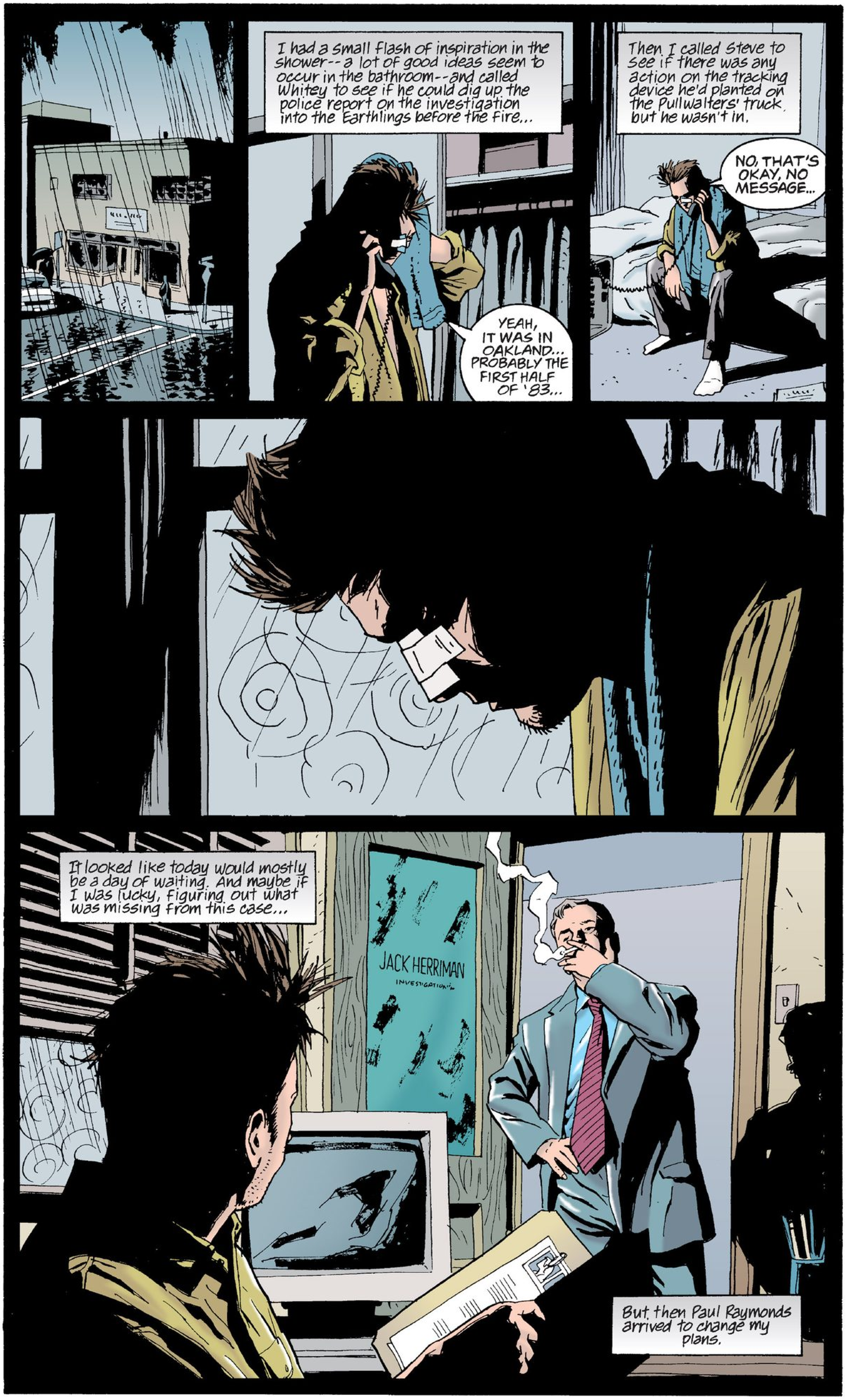

I THINK THIS MIGHT BE *YOU*, RIGHT HERE, BUT IT'S HARD TO TELL.
OH MY *GOD*...
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BOTH YOUR DAUGHTERS STARTED *RIGHT THERE*... AND I MET ANOTHER GIRL TODAY WHOSE LIFE WAS RUINED BY THAT FIRE... AND THAT COMMUNE.
I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY *WHY* MAGGIE WAS KILLED, BUT I KNOW THAT IT WAS CONNECTED TO THAT PLACE, AND THE FIRE, AND THE DEATH OF HER FATHER.
SO DON'T YOU GO TRYING TO PUT ALL YOUR BLAME OFF ON *ME*. I FEEL BAD ENOUGH ALREADY.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO BROUGHT YOUR KIDS INTO THAT PLACE, AND GOD *KNOWS* WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM THERE...
I'M JUST CLEANIN' UP YOUR MESS...
WE WERE JUST CHILDREN OURSELVES... WE MADE MISTAKES... I TRIED TO MAKE IT UP TO THEM... I WAS SORRY...
LOOK, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO HELP THEM, THEN HELP *ME* NOW...
TELL ME WHAT WAS GOING ON AT THE EARTHLINGS' COMMUNE ... WHY WERE THE POLICE LOOKING INTO *VIRGIL PETERSON*?
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND... I DIDN'T REALLY *KNOW* WHAT WAS GOING ON AT THE TIME...
I WAS HIGH A LOT... I MEAN, THAT WAS *SUPPOSED* TO BE PART OF THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE...

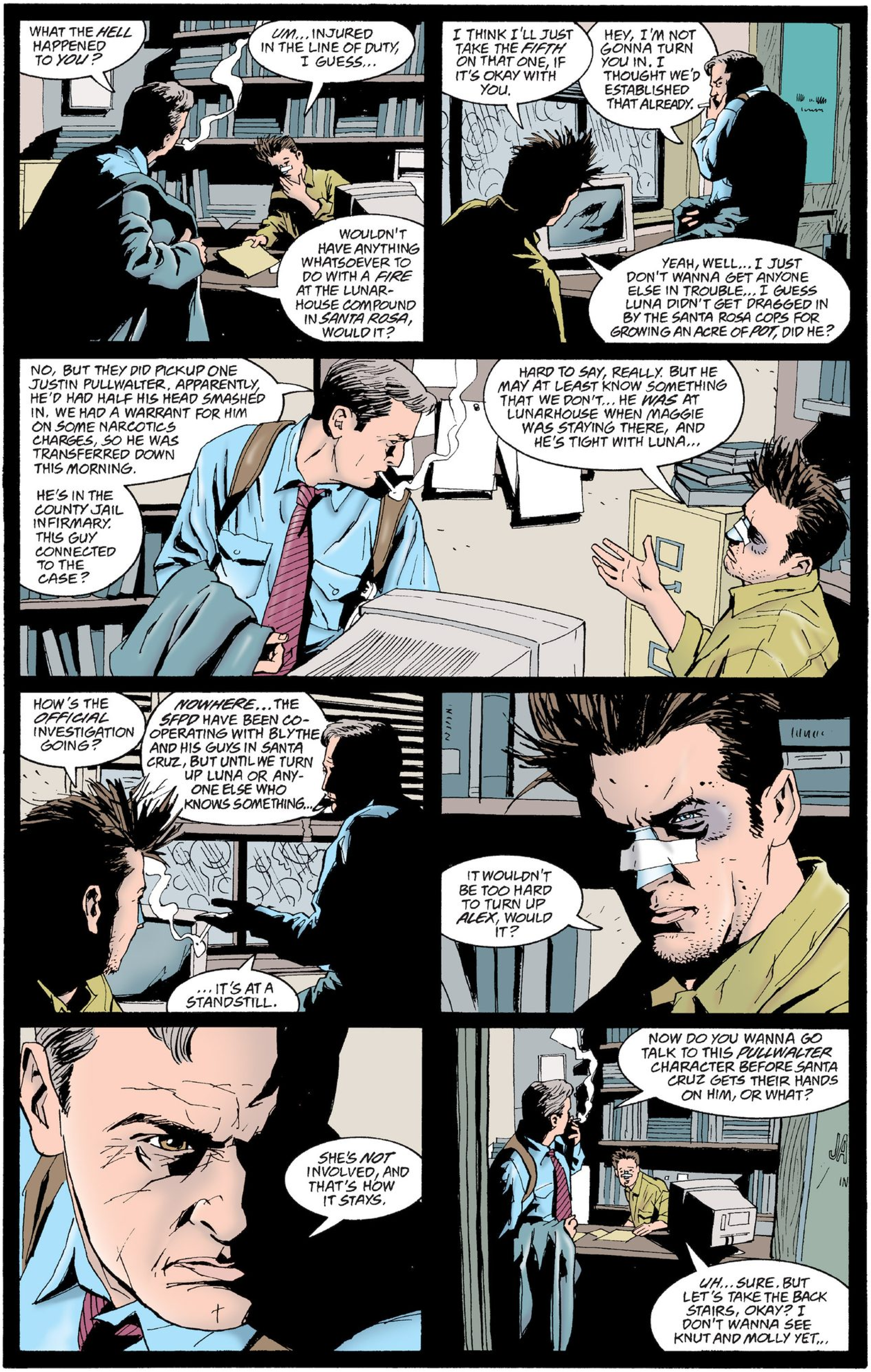

"THAT AND THE SEX... VIRGIL SAID WE SHOULD BE MUCH MORE OPEN ABOUT OUR SEXUALITY... THAT OUR ORGASMS WERE POWERFUL THINGS... IT WAS A FAIRLY OLD IDEA BY THAT POINT, I SUPPOSE... BUT I WAS FROM A LITTLE TOWN IN THE MIDWEST THAT HAD GOTTEN COMPLETELY PASSED OVER BY THE '60s...
"AND IN SAN FRANCISCO, THE '70s WERE STILL SORT OF LIKE THE '60s TO A LOT OF PEOPLE... WE MET VIRGIL IN '75, AND I WAS ALREADY A MOTHER OF TWO... I SAW MY LIFE JUST PASSING ME BY... SO DID GEOFF...
"SO WE DROPPED OUT... WE WENT TO LIVE A DIFFERENT KIND OF LIFE ... BUT IT GOT UGLY AFTER AWHILE. VIRGIL HAD US ALL THINKING WE WERE DOING THE RIGHT THING, BREAKING ALL OF SOCIETY'S RULES... BUT OUR WHOLE LIVES SLOWLY BECAME ABOUT NOTHING BUT DRUGS AND SEX...
"THE CHILDREN WERE ALL KEPT SEPARATE FROM US... IN THEIR OWN HOUSE... IT SEEMED SO SMART AT THE TIME. THAT WAY WE DIDN'T HAVE TO SACRIFICE ALL OF OUR TIME FOR THEM. BUT... THAT GOT UGLY, TOO..."
VIRGIL THOUGHT THE CHILDREN SHOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH THEIR SEXUAL SIDE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE, SO HE WAS ENCOURAGING THEM TO EXPERIMENT WITH EACH OTHER. BUT THAT WASN'T ENOUGH... HE STARTED MAKING SOME OF THE GIRLS GIVE HIM HEAD. HE CLAIMED HE WAS JUST TEACHING THEM, BUT...
JESUS... AND YOU LET THIS GO ON? EVERYONE KNEW ABOUT THIS?
NOT IN THE BEGINNING... BUT IT DIDN'T STOP THERE... SOON HE WAS SCREWING THEM... OUR LITTLE GIRLS. AND THEN SOME OF THE OTHER MEN STARTED IN, AS WELL...
IT WAS JUST MORE SEX TO MOST OF THEM... BREAKING MORE TABOOS...
SOMEONE MUST HAVE SAID THIS WAS NOT OKAY, RIGHT?

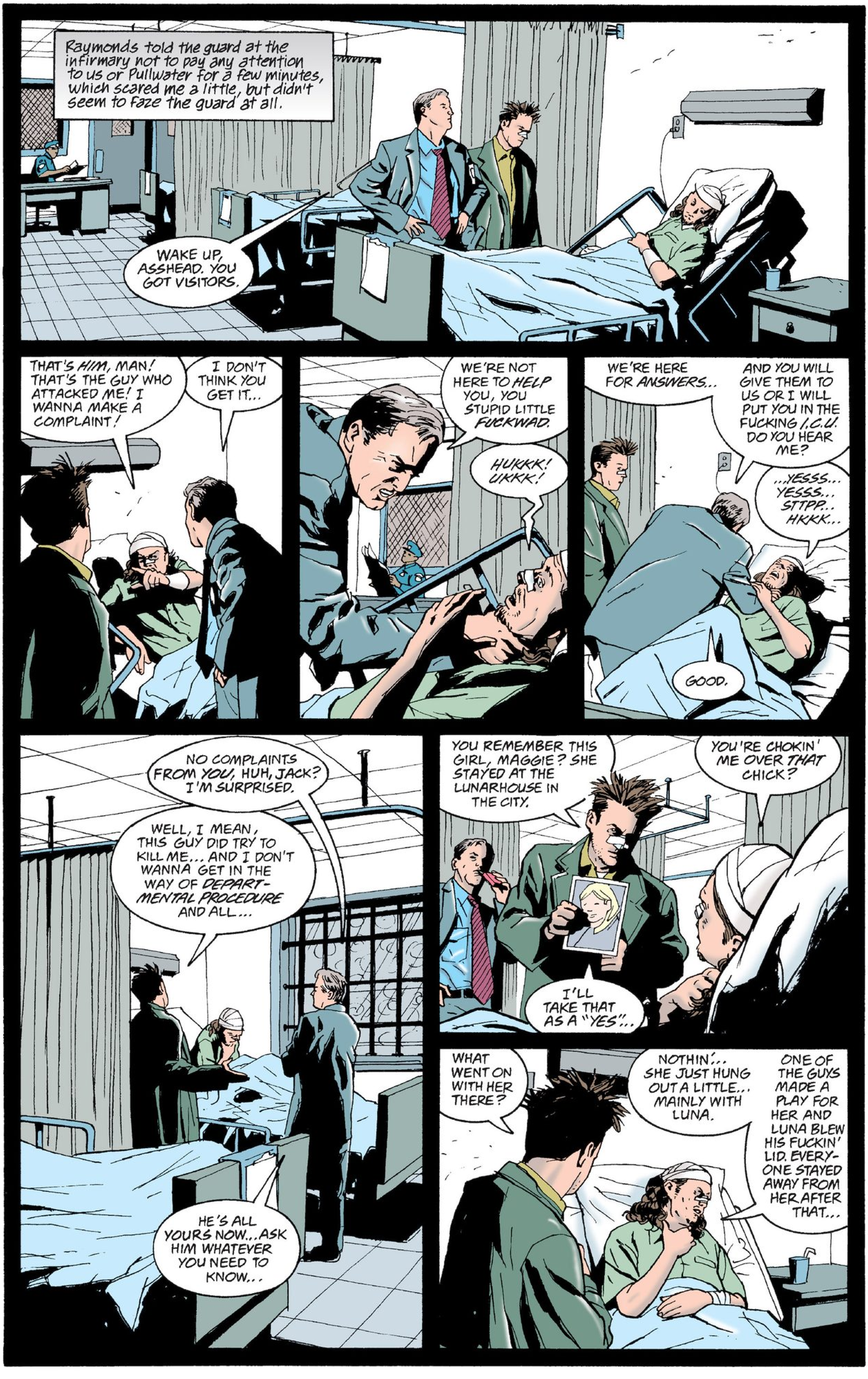

ONE OF THE GIRLS GOT PREGNANT AND THERE WAS A *BIG* FIGHT ABOUT IT. A FEW FAMILIES PULLED OUT OF THE COMMUNE, AND SOME OF THEM WENT TO THE *POLICE*, OR AT LEAST *THREATENED* TO...
SO THAT'S WHY VIRGIL TORCHED THE PLACE?
WHAT? VIRGIL DIDN'T START THAT FIRE.
HE *DIDN'T?*
NO, MAGGIE DID...
MAGGIE *ALWAYS* STARTED FIRES.

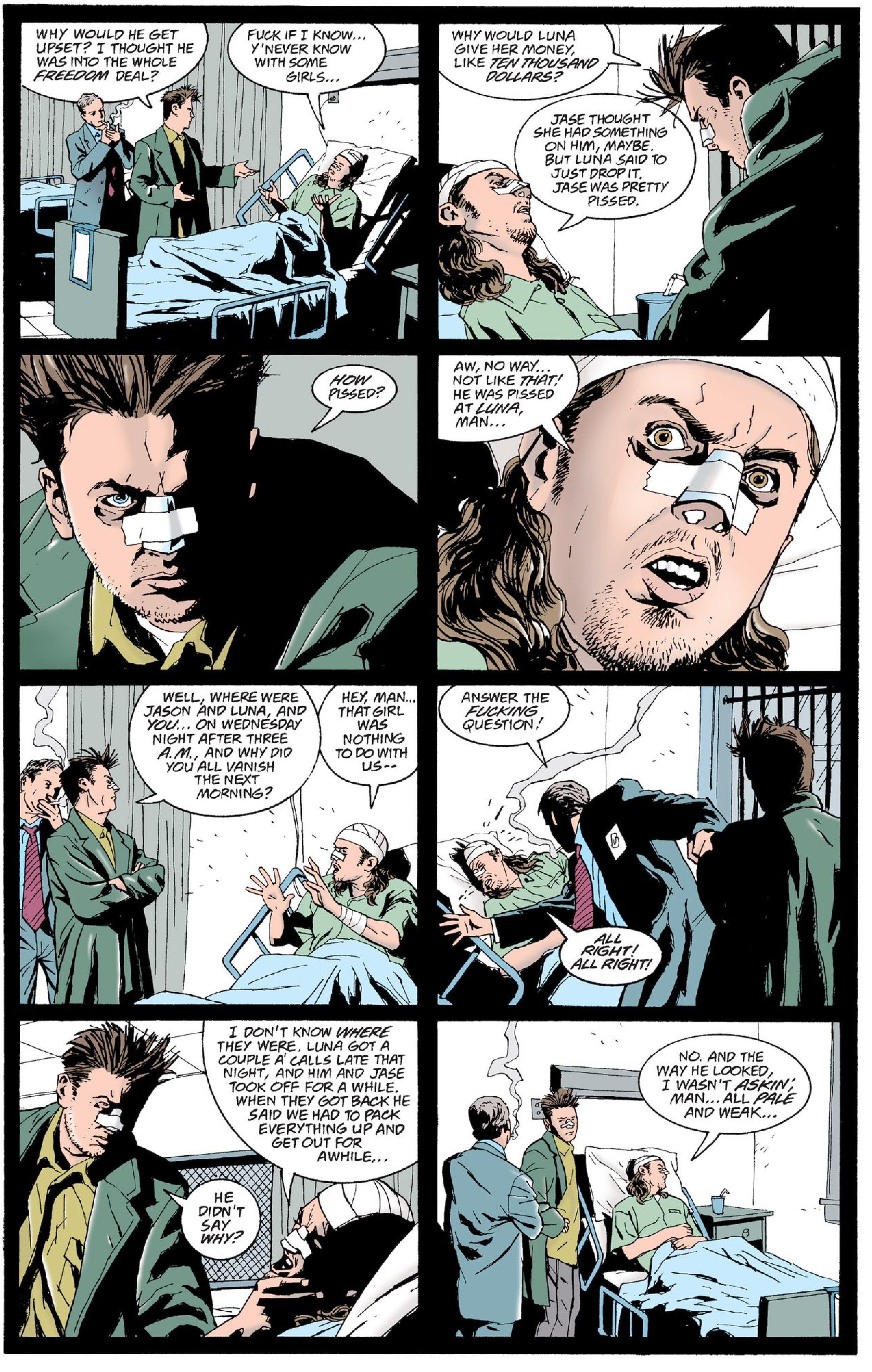
Chapter Seventeen

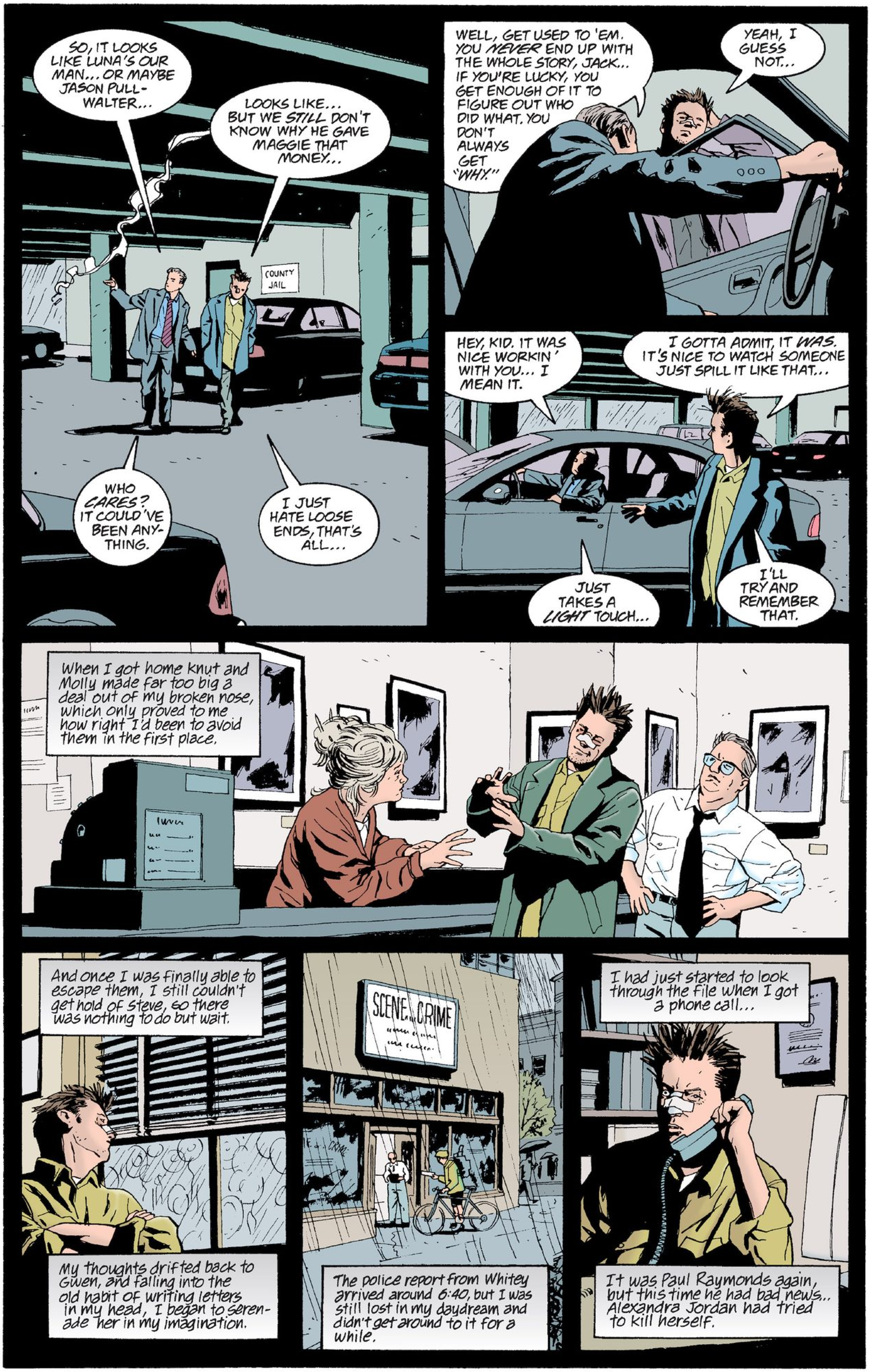

In my dreams that night Maggie Jordan was running from the flames of her past, but the fire was always quicker, leaping ahead of her at every turn. Until she was surrounded.
I awoke sweating, thinking about her father, and about her childhood friend, Sandy.
If Maggie was the one responsible for the Earthlings fire, then why was she blackmailing Luna? If he wasn't to blame for the deaths of their father and the others, then what did he have to be afraid of? Fifteen-year-old charges of child molesting?
I'd have to check the law, but I was fairly sure the Statute of Limitations had run out on that crime.
Of course, there was always the possibility it was over drugs. It was even possible that she had STOLEN the money...
I could see either of the Pullwalter boys being mad enough about that to kill.
But then why the hell would she be calling the Lunarhouse and leaving her phone number?


I had a small flash of inspiration in the shower--a lot of good ideas seem to occur in the bathroom--and called Whitey to see if he could dig up the police report on the investigation into the Earthlings before the fire...
YEAH, IT WAS IN OAKLAND... PROBABLY THE FIRST HALF OF '83...
Then I called Steve to see if there was any action on the tracking device he'd planted on the Pullwalters' truck, but he wasn't in.
NO, THAT'S OKAY, NO MESSAGE...
It looked like today would mostly be a day of waiting. And maybe if I was lucky, figuring out what was missing from this case...
JACK HERRIMAN
INVESTIGATIONS
But, then Paul Raymonds arrived to change my plans.

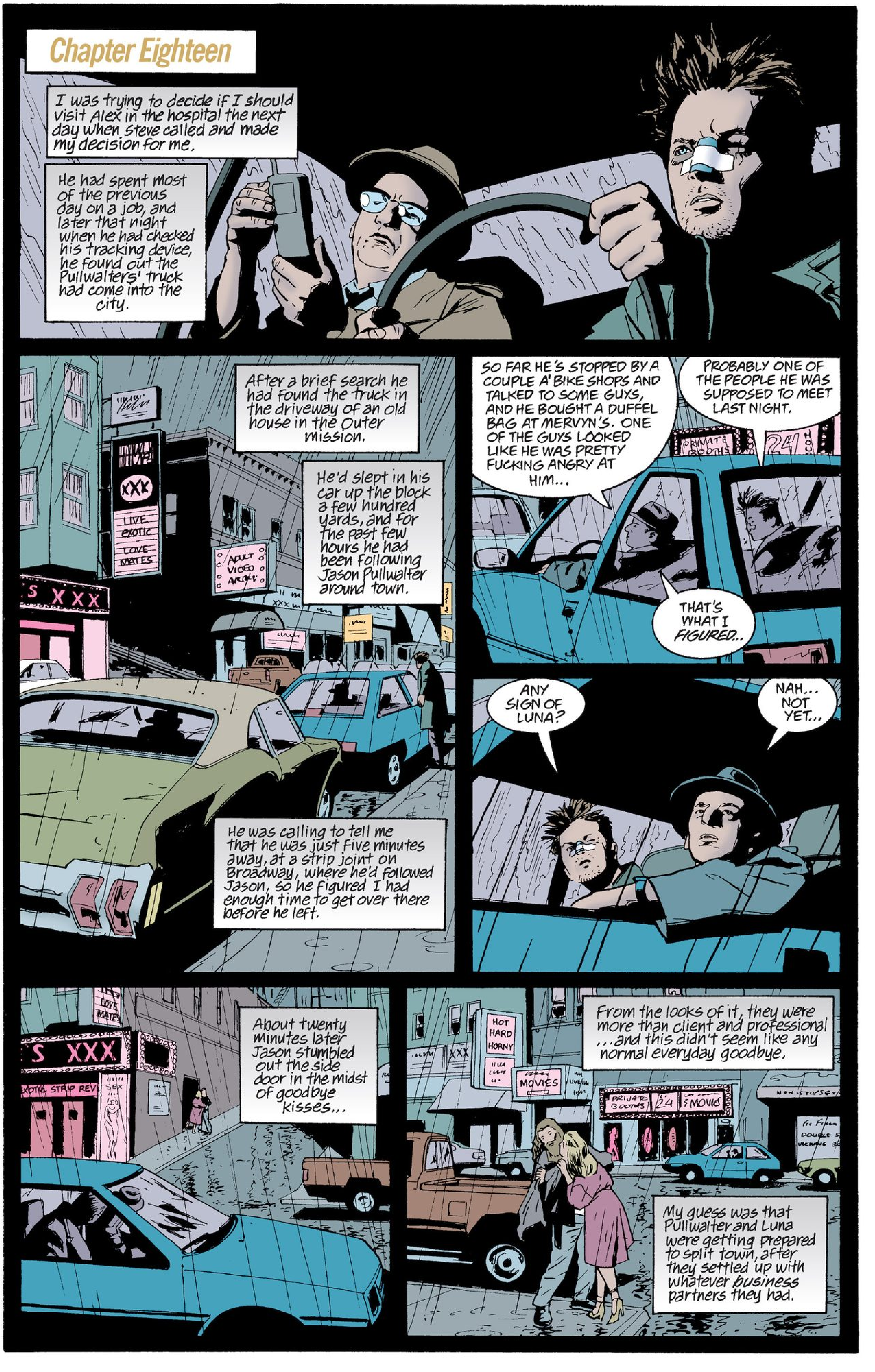

WHAT THE *HELL* HAPPENED TO *YOU*?
UM... INJURED IN THE LINE OF DUTY, I GUESS...
WOULDN'T HAVE ANYTHING WHATSOEVER TO DO WITH A *FIRE* AT THE LUNARHOUSE COMPOUND IN *SANTA ROSA*, WOULD IT?
I THINK I'LL JUST TAKE THE *FIFTH* ON THAT ONE, IF IT'S OKAY WITH YOU.
HEY, I'M NOT GONNA TURN YOU IN. I THOUGHT WE'D ESTABLISHED THAT ALREADY.
YEAH, WELL... I JUST DON'T WANNA GET ANYONE ELSE IN TROUBLE... I GUESS LUNA DIDN'T GET DRAGGED IN BY THE SANTA ROSA COPS FOR GROWING AN ACRE OF *POT*, DID HE?
NO, BUT THEY DID PICKUP ONE JUSTIN PULLWALTER. APPARENTLY, HE'D HAD HALF HIS HEAD *SMASHED* IN. WE HAD A WARRANT FOR HIM ON SOME NARCOTICS CHARGES, SO HE WAS TRANSFERRED DOWN THIS MORNING.
HE'S IN THE COUNTY JAIL INFIRMARY. THIS GUY CONNECTED TO THE CASE?
HARD TO SAY, REALLY. BUT HE MAY AT LEAST KNOW SOMETHING THAT WE DON'T... HE *WAS* AT LUNARHOUSE WHEN *MAGGIE* WAS STAYING THERE, AND HE'S TIGHT WITH LUNA...
HOW'S THE *OFFICIAL* INVESTIGATION GOING?
NOWHERE... THE *SFPD* HAVE BEEN CO-OPERATING WITH BLYTHE AND HIS GUYS IN SANTA CRUZ, BUT UNTIL WE TURN UP LUNA OR ANYONE ELSE WHO KNOWS SOMETHING...
...IT'S AT A STANDSTILL.
IT WOULDN'T BE TOO HARD TO TURN UP *ALEX*, WOULD IT?
SHE'S NOT INVOLVED, AND THAT'S HOW IT STAYS.
NOW DO YOU WANNA GO TALK TO THIS *PULLWALTER* CHARACTER BEFORE SANTA CRUZ GETS THEIR HANDS ON HIM, OR WHAT?
UH... SURE. BUT LET'S TAKE THE BACK STAIRS, OKAY? I DON'T WANNA SEE KNUT AND MOLLY YET...

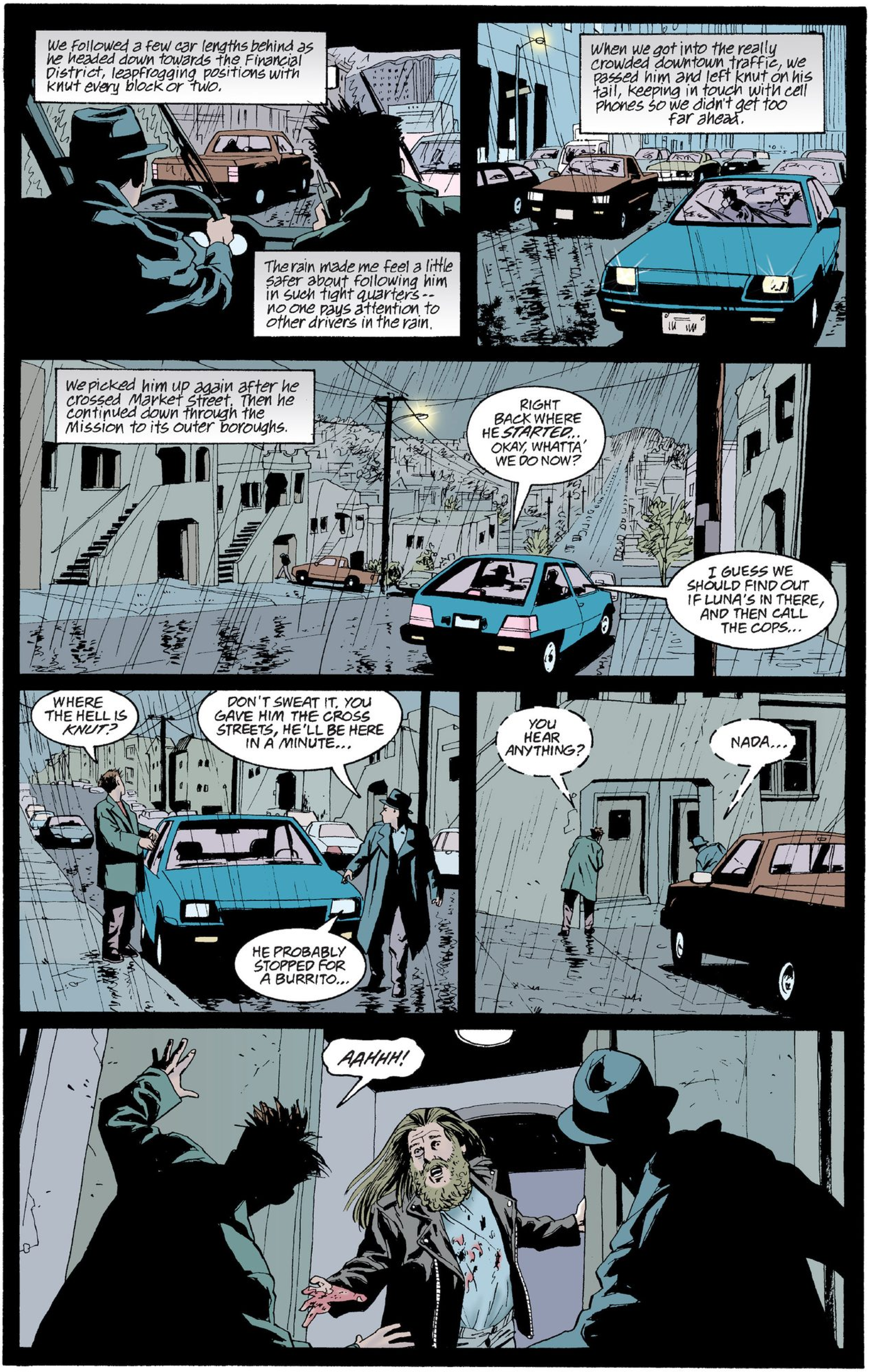

Raymonds told the guard at the infirmary not to pay any attention to us or Pullwater for a few minutes, which scared me a little, but didn't seem to faze the guard at all.
WAKE UP, ASSHEAD. YOU GOT VISITORS.
THAT'S *HIM*, MAN! THAT'S THE GUY WHO ATTACKED ME! I WANNA MAKE A COMPLAINT!
I DON'T THINK YOU GET IT...
WE'RE NOT HERE TO *HELP* YOU, YOU STUPID LITTLE *FUCKWAD.*
HUKKK! UKKK!
WE'RE HERE FOR *ANSWERS*...
AND YOU WILL GIVE THEM TO US OR I WILL PUT YOU IN THE FUCKING *I.C.U.* DO YOU HEAR ME?
...YESSS... YESSS... STTPP... HKKK...
GOOD.
NO COMPLAINTS FROM *YOU*, HUH, JACK? I'M SURPRISED.
WELL, I MEAN, THIS GUY DID TRY TO KILL ME... AND I DON'T WANNA GET IN THE WAY OF *DEPARTMENTAL PROCEDURE* AND ALL...
HE'S ALL YOURS NOW... ASK HIM WHATEVER YOU NEED TO KNOW...
YOU REMEMBER THIS GIRL, MAGGIE? SHE STAYED AT THE LUNARHOUSE IN THE CITY.
YOU'RE CHOKIN' ME OVER *THAT* CHICK?
I'LL TAKE THAT AS A "*YES*"...
WHAT WENT ON WITH HER THERE?
NOTHIN'... SHE JUST HUNG OUT A LITTLE... MAINLY WITH LUNA.
ONE OF THE GUYS MADE A PLAY FOR HER AND LUNA BLEW HIS FUCKIN' LID. EVERYONE STAYED AWAY FROM HER AFTER THAT...

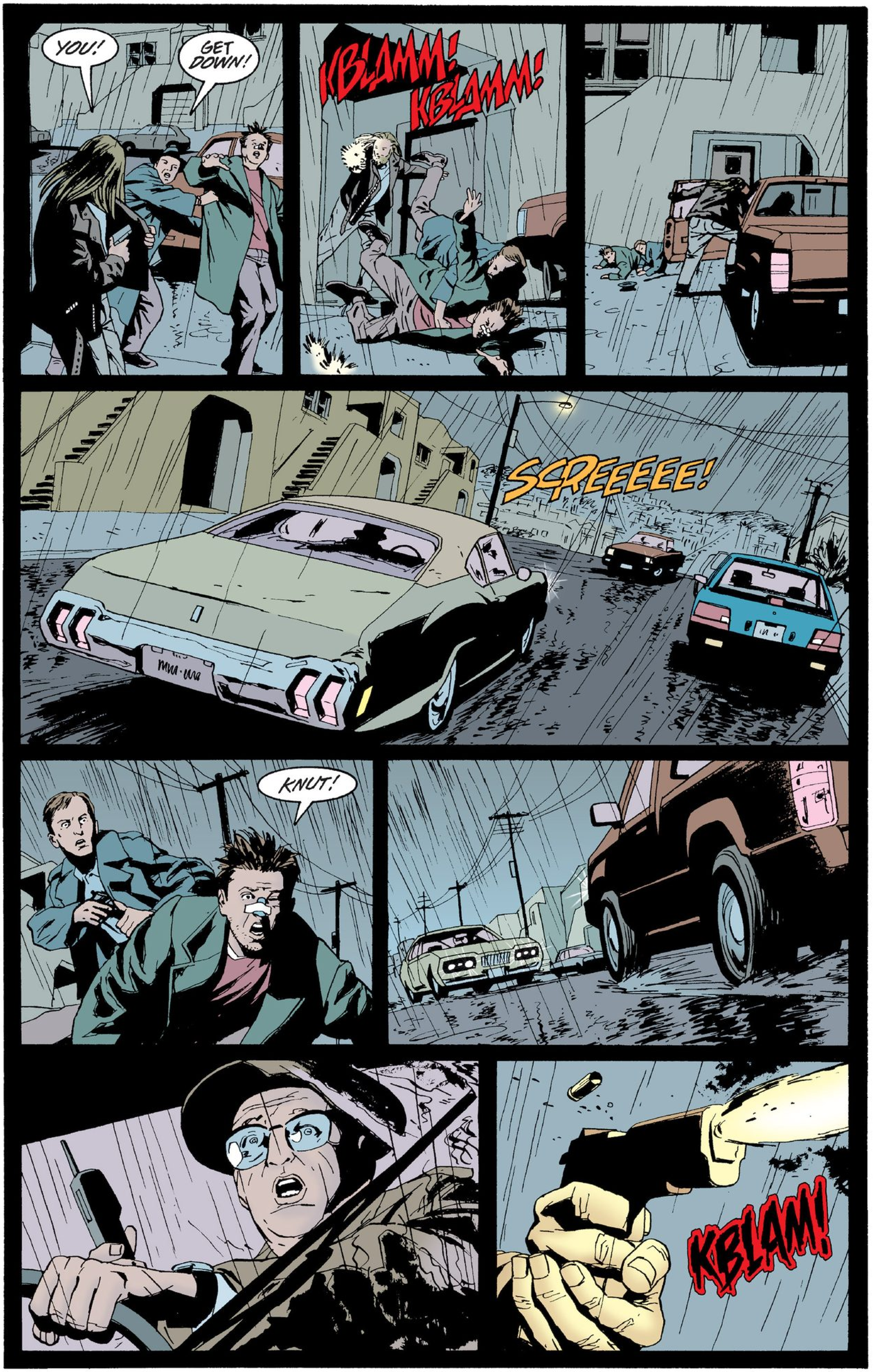

WHY WOULD HE GET UPSET? I THOUGHT HE WAS INTO THE WHOLE *FREEDOM* DEAL?
FUCK IF I KNOW... Y'NEVER KNOW WITH SOME GIRLS...
WHY WOULD LUNA GIVE HER MONEY, LIKE *TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS?*
JASE THOUGHT SHE HAD SOMETHING ON HIM, MAYBE. BUT LUNA SAID TO JUST DROP IT. JASE WAS PRETTY PISSED.
HOW PISSED?
AW, NO WAY... NOT LIKE *THAT!* HE WAS PISSED AT *LUNA,* MAN...
WELL, WHERE WERE JASON AND LUNA, AND *YOU*... ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT AFTER THREE *A.M.*, AND WHY DID YOU ALL VANISH THE NEXT MORNING?
HEY, MAN... THAT GIRL WAS NOTHING TO DO WITH US--
ANSWER THE *FUCKING* QUESTION!
ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT!
I DON'T KNOW *WHERE* THEY WERE. LUNA GOT A COUPLE A' CALLS LATE THAT NIGHT, AND HIM AND JASE TOOK OFF FOR A WHILE. WHEN THEY GOT BACK HE SAID WE HAD TO PACK EVERYTHING UP AND GET OUT FOR AWHILE...
HE DIDN'T SAY *WHY?*
NO. AND THE WAY HE LOOKED, I WASN'T *ASKIN',* MAN... ALL *PALE* AND WEAK...

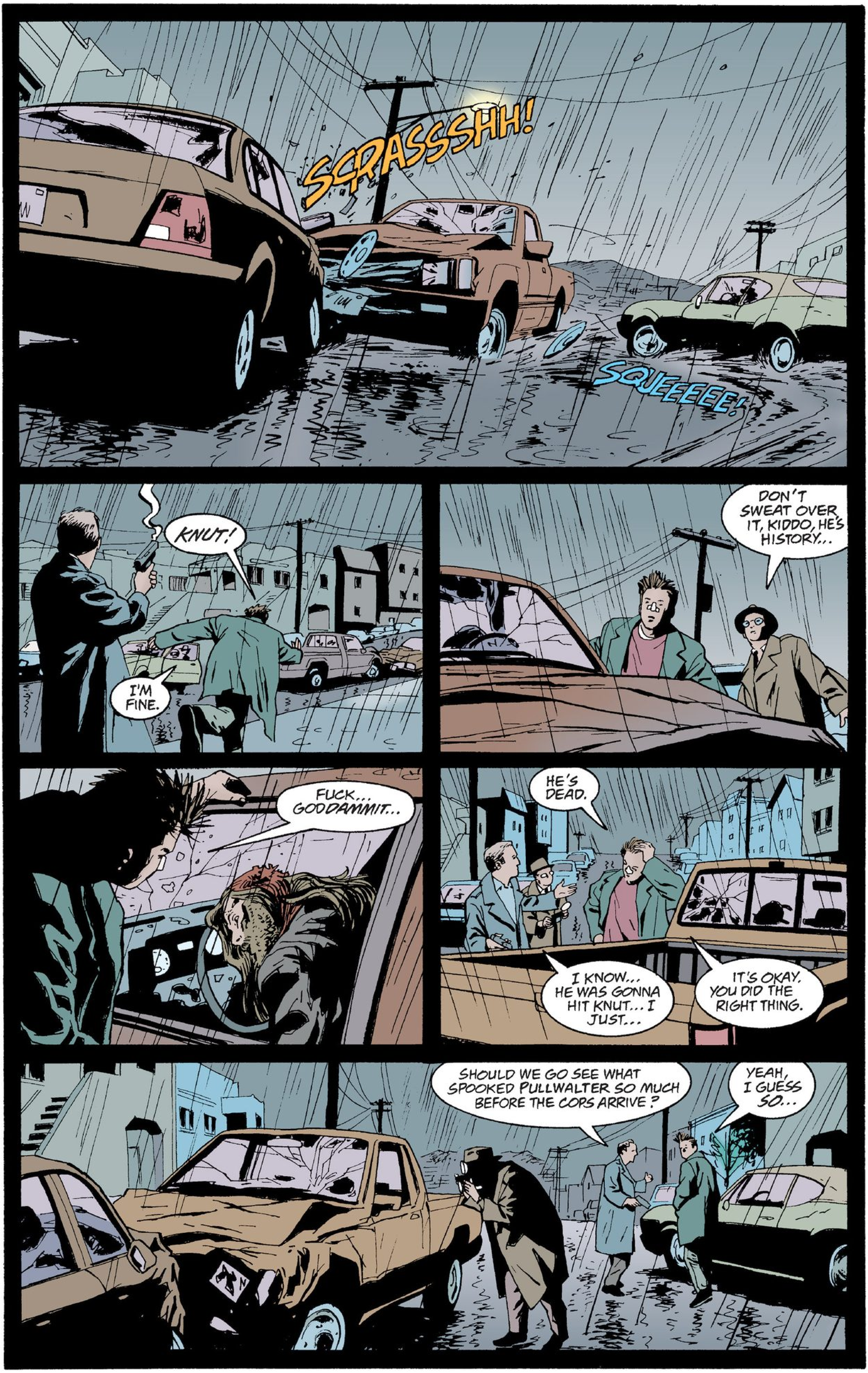

SO, IT LOOKS LIKE LUNA'S OUR MAN... OR MAYBE JASON PULLWALTER...
LOOKS LIKE... BUT WE *STILL* DON'T KNOW WHY HE GAVE MAGGIE THAT MONEY...
COUNTY JAIL
WHO *CARES*? IT COULD'VE BEEN ANYTHING.
I JUST HATE LOOSE ENDS, THAT'S ALL...
WELL, GET USED TO 'EM. YOU *NEVER* END UP WITH THE WHOLE STORY, JACK... IF YOU'RE LUCKY, YOU GET ENOUGH OF IT TO FIGURE OUT WHO DID WHAT. YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET "*WHY*."
YEAH, I GUESS NOT...
HEY, KID. IT WAS NICE WORKIN' WITH YOU... I MEAN IT.
I GOTTA ADMIT, IT *WAS*. IT'S NICE TO WATCH SOMEONE JUST SPILL IT LIKE THAT...
JUST TAKES A *LIGHT* TOUCH...
I'LL TRY AND REMEMBER THAT.
When I got home Knut and Molly made far too big a deal out of my broken nose, which only proved to me how right I'd been to avoid them in the first place.
And once I was finally able to escape them, I still couldn't get hold of Steve, so there was nothing to do but wait.
My thoughts drifted back to Gwen, and falling into the old habit of writing letters in my head, I began to serenade her in my imagination.
SCENE OF THE CRIME
The police report from Whitey arrived around 6:40, but I was still lost in my daydream and didn't get around to it for a while.
I had just started to look through the file when I got a phone call...
It was Paul Raymonds again, but this time he had bad news... Alexandra Jordan had tried to kill herself.

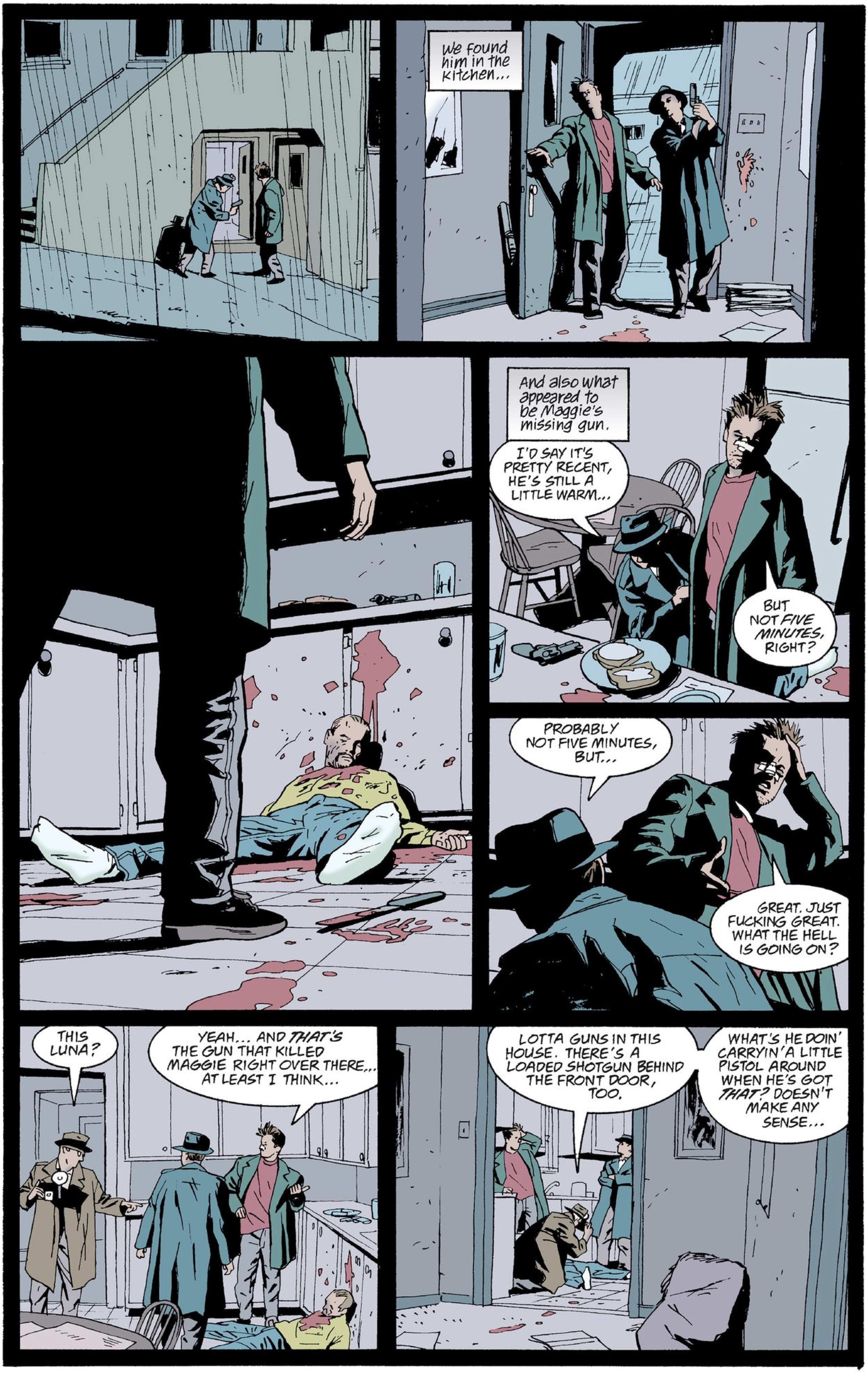
Chapter Eighteen


I was trying to decide if I should visit Alex in the hospital the next day when Steve called and made my decision for me.
He had spent most of the previous day on a job, and later that night when he had checked his tracking device, he found out the Pullwalters' truck had come into the city.
After a brief search he had found the truck in the driveway of an old house in the Outer mission.
He'd slept in his car up the block a few hundred yards, and for the past few hours he had been following Jason Pullwalter around town.
XXX
LIVE EXOTIC LOVE MATES
ADULT VIDEO ARCADE
S XXX
He was calling to tell me that he was just five minutes away, at a strip joint on Broadway, where he'd followed Jason, so he figured I had enough time to get over there before he left.
SO FAR HE'S STOPPED BY A COUPLE A' BIKE SHOPS AND TALKED TO SOME GUYS, AND HE BOUGHT A DUFFEL BAG AT MERVYN'S. ONE OF THE GUYS LOOKED LIKE HE WAS PRETTY FUCKING ANGRY AT HIM...
PROBABLY ONE OF THE PEOPLE HE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET LAST NIGHT.
PRIVATE BOOTHS
24
THAT'S WHAT I *FIGURED*...
ANY SIGN OF LUNA?
NAH... NOT YET...
LOVE MATES
S XXX
EXOTIC STRIP REV
SEX
About twenty minutes later Jason stumbled out the side door in the midst of goodbye kisses...
HOT HARD HORNY
XXX
MOVIES
PRIVATE BOOTHS
24
MOVIE
NON-STOP SEX
From the looks of it, they were more than client and professional ...and this didn't seem like any normal everyday goodbye.
My guess was that Pullwalter and Luna were getting prepared to split town, after they settled up with whatever *business* partners they had.

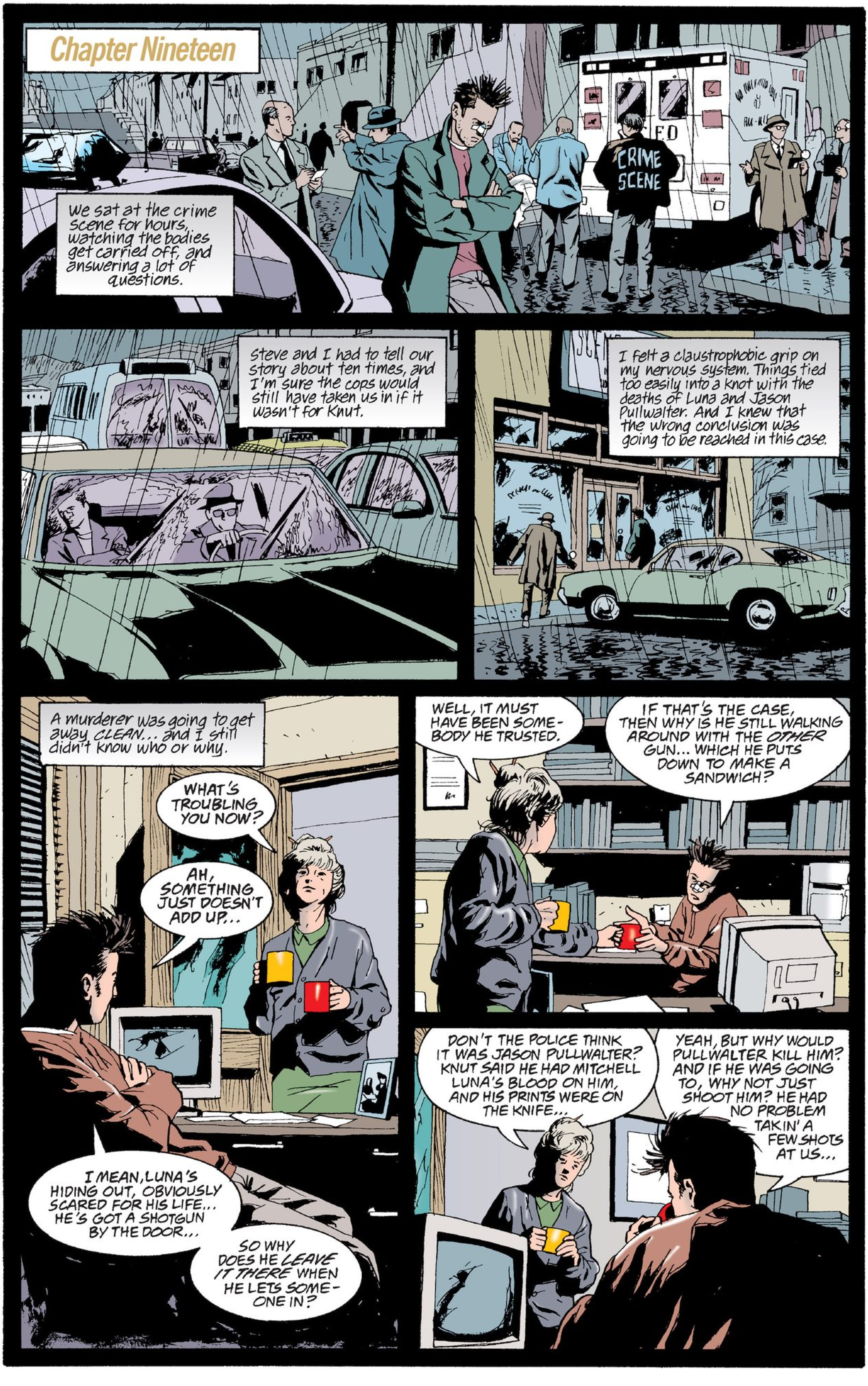

We followed a few car lengths behind as he headed down towards the Financial District, leapfrogging positions with knut every block or two.
The rain made me feel a little safer about following him in such tight quarters -- no one pays attention to other drivers in the rain.
When we got into the really crowded downtown traffic, we passed him and left knut on his tail, keeping in touch with cell phones so we didn't get too far ahead.
We picked him up again after he crossed Market Street. Then he continued down through the Mission to its outer boroughs.
RIGHT BACK WHERE HE STARTED.. OKAY, WHATTA' WE DO NOW?
I GUESS WE SHOULD FIND OUT IF LUNA'S IN THERE, AND THEN CALL THE COPS...
WHERE THE HELL IS KNUT?
DON'T SWEAT IT. YOU GAVE HIM THE CROSS STREETS, HE'LL BE HERE IN A MINUTE...
HE PROBABLY STOPPED FOR A BURRITO...
YOU HEAR ANYTHING?
NADA...
AAHHH!

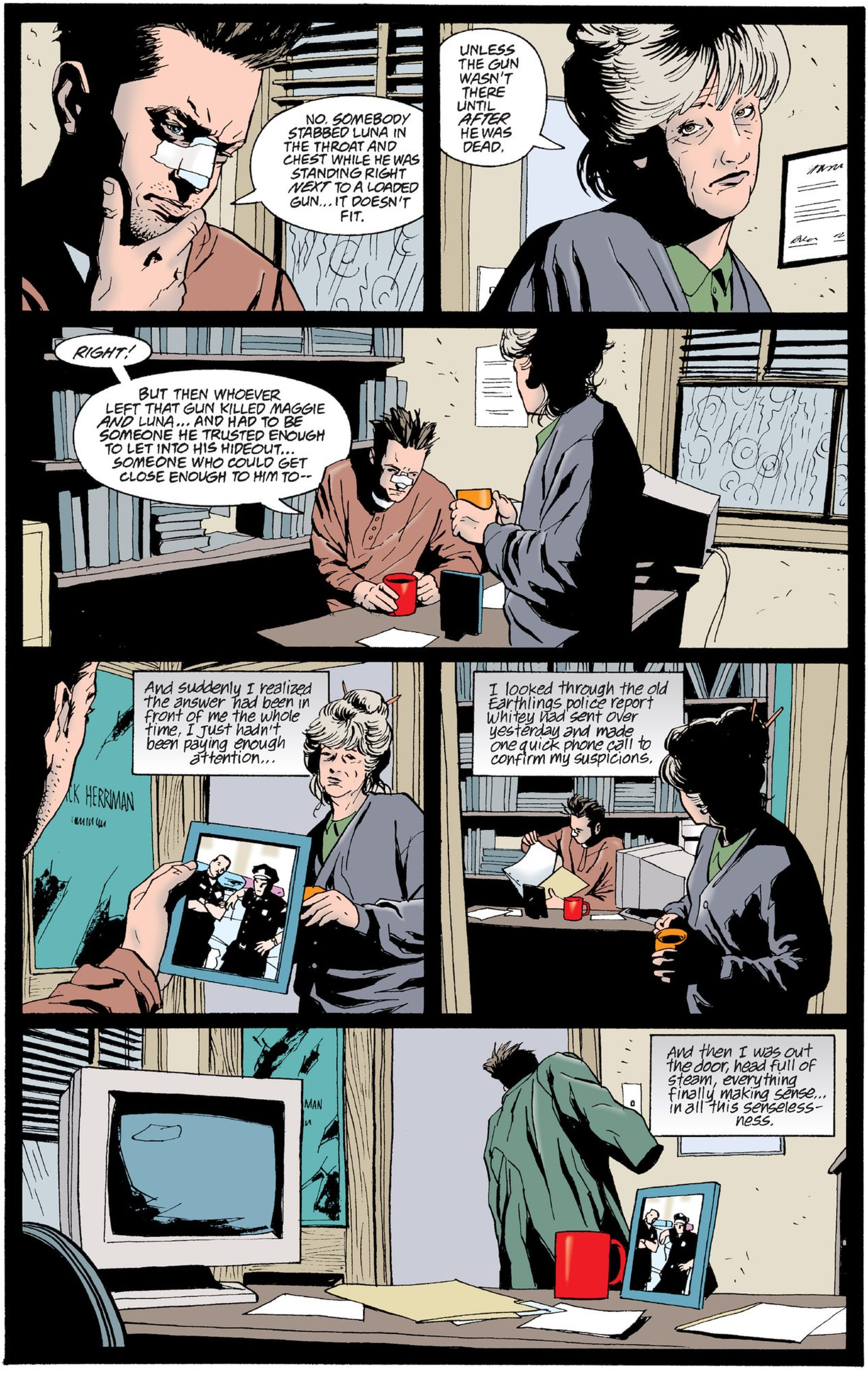

YOU!
GET DOWN!
KBLAMM! KBLAMM!
SCREEEEEE!
KNUT!
KBLAM!


SCRASSSHH!
SQUEEEEEE!
KNUT!
I'M FINE.
DON'T SWEAT OVER IT, KIDDO, HE'S HISTORY...
FUCK... GODDAMMIT...
HE'S DEAD.
I KNOW... HE WAS GONNA HIT KNUT... I JUST...
IT'S OKAY. YOU DID THE RIGHT THING.
SHOULD WE GO SEE WHAT SPOOKED PULLWALTER SO MUCH BEFORE THE COPS ARRIVE?
YEAH, I GUESS SO...

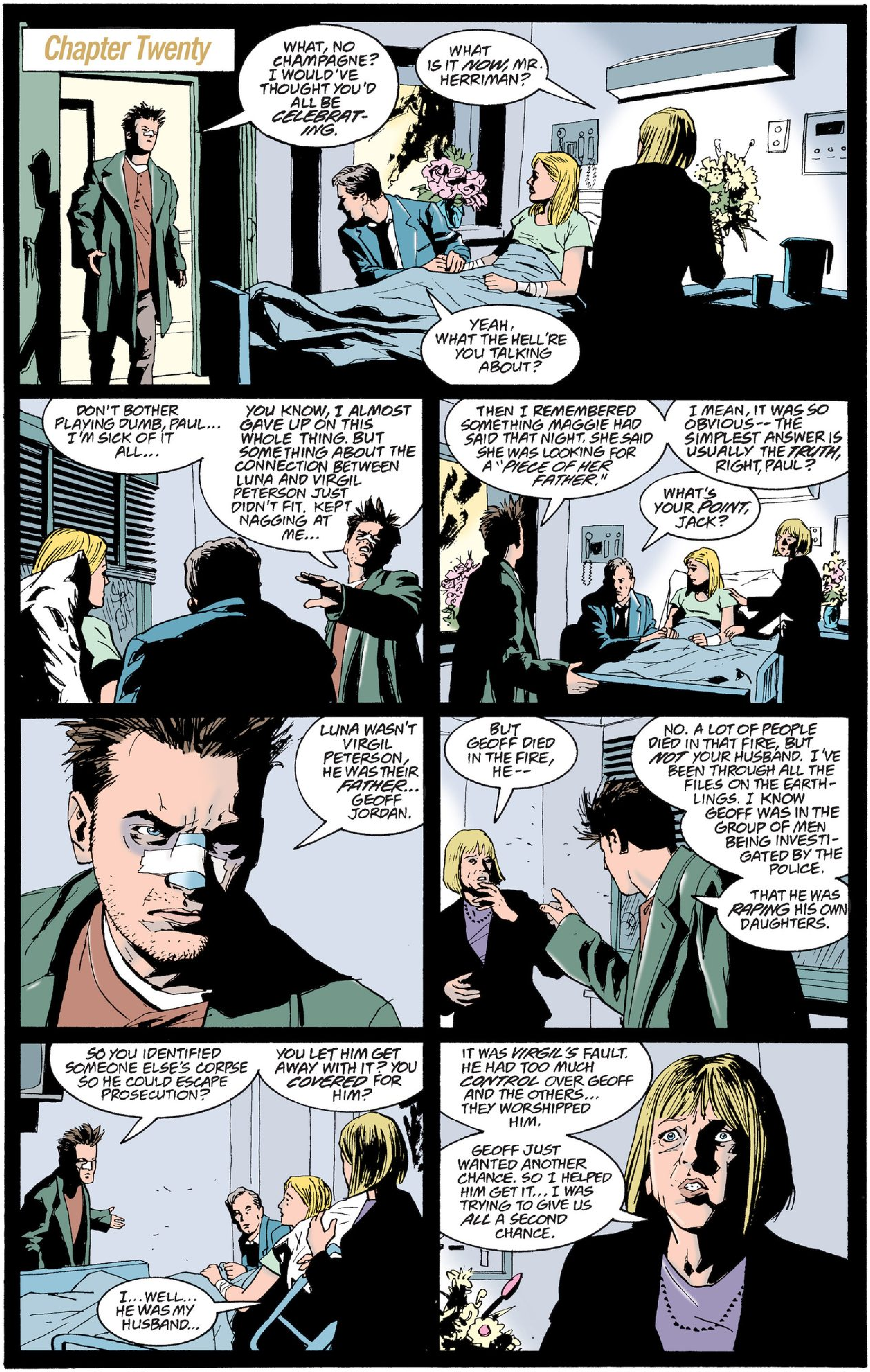

We found him in the kitchen...
And also what appeared to be Maggie's missing gun.
I'D SAY IT'S PRETTY RECENT, HE'S STILL A LITTLE WARM...
BUT NOT *FIVE MINUTES*, RIGHT?
PROBABLY NOT FIVE MINUTES, BUT...
GREAT. JUST FUCKING GREAT. WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
THIS LUNA?
YEAH... AND *THAT'S* THE GUN THAT KILLED MAGGIE RIGHT OVER THERE... AT LEAST I THINK...
LOTTA GUNS IN THIS HOUSE. THERE'S A LOADED SHOTGUN BEHIND THE FRONT DOOR, TOO.
WHAT'S HE DOIN' CARRYIN' A LITTLE PISTOL AROUND WHEN HE'S GOT *THAT*? DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE...

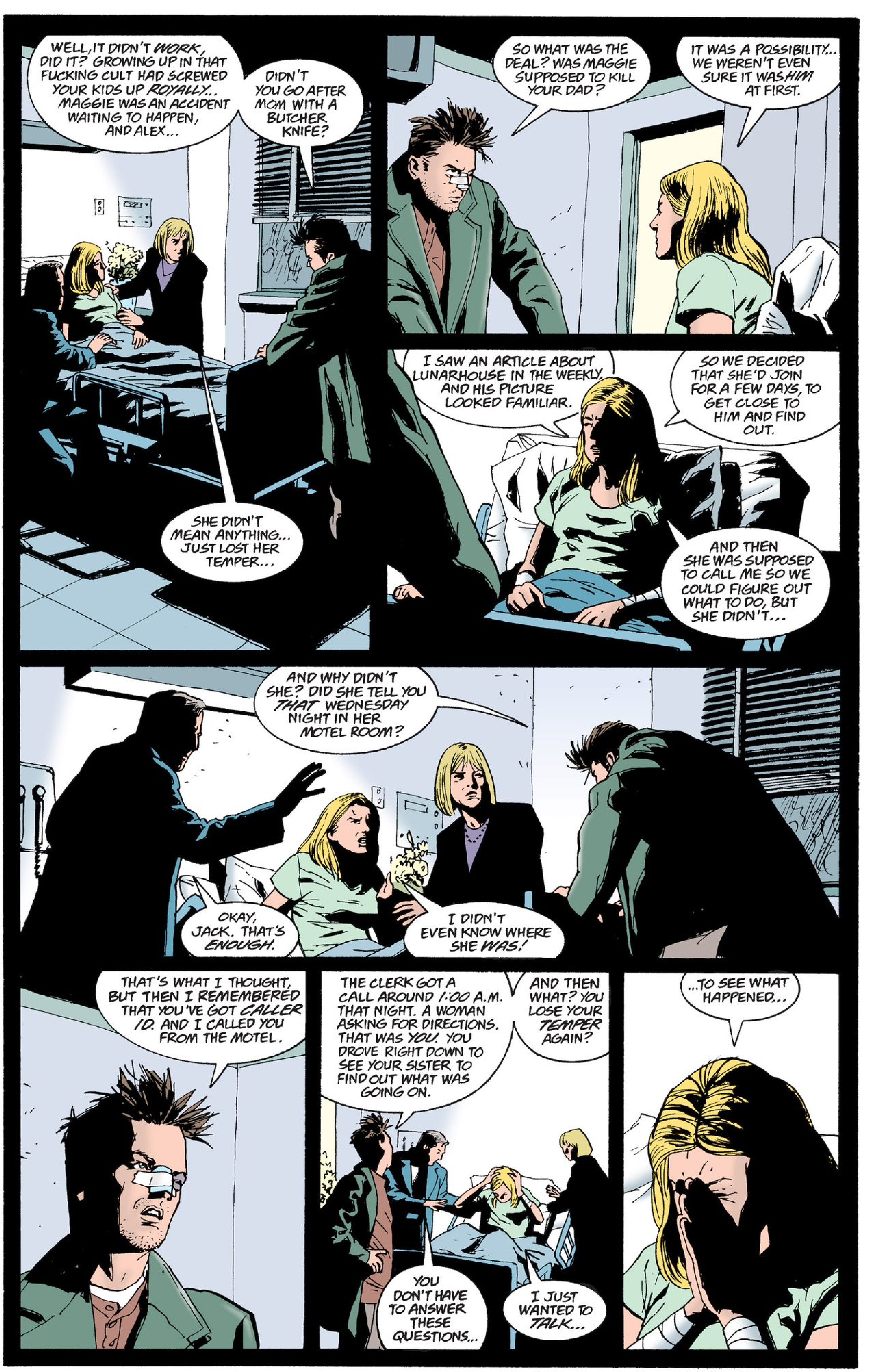
Chapter Nineteen

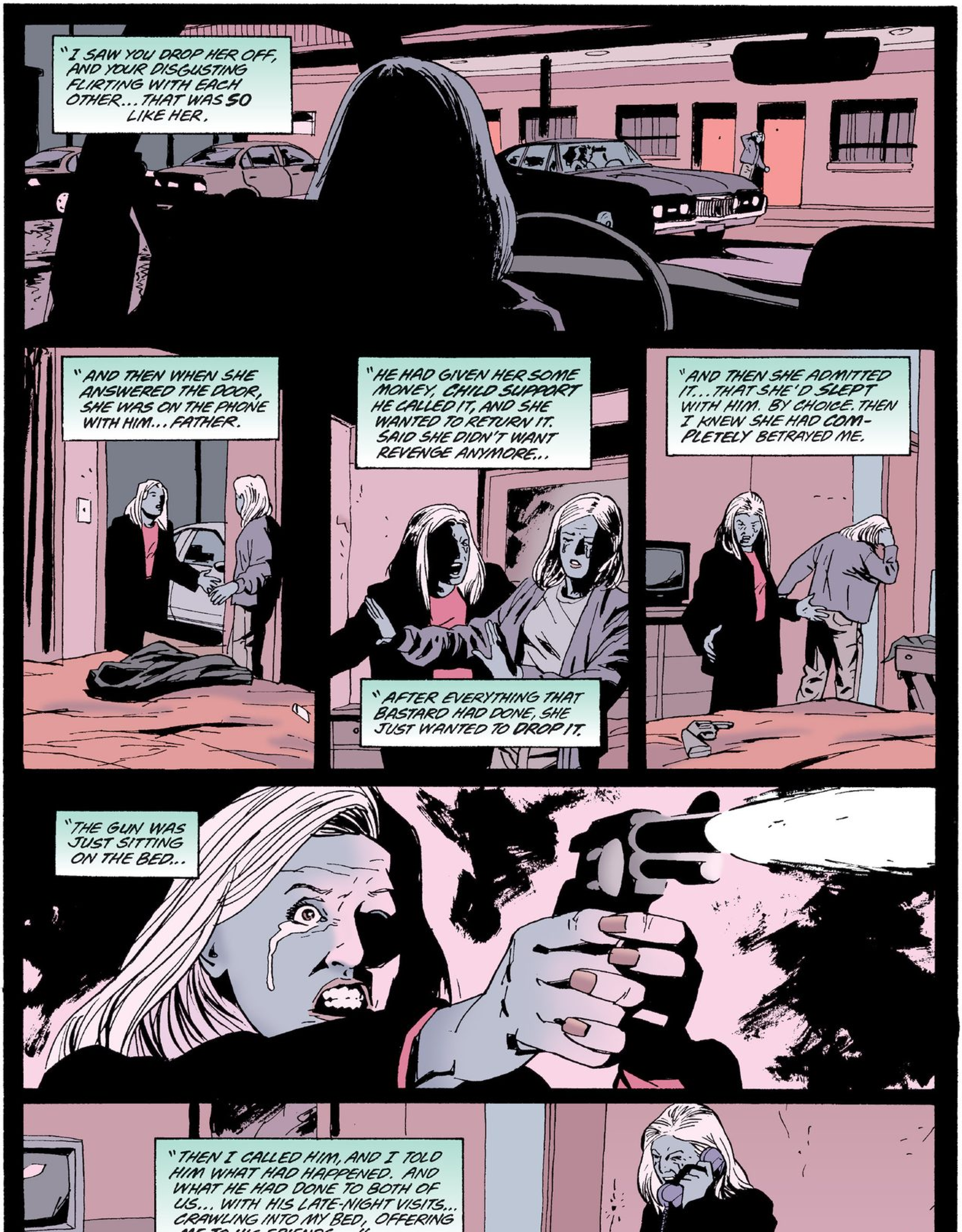

We sat at the crime scene for hours, watching the bodies get carried off, and answering a lot of questions.
CRIME SCENE
Steve and I had to tell our story about ten times, and I'm sure the cops would still have taken us in if it wasn't for Knut.
I felt a claustrophobic grip on my nervous system. Things tied too easily into a knot with the deaths of Luna and Jason Pullwalter. And I knew that the wrong conclusion was going to be reached in this case.
A murderer was going to get away CLEAN... and I still didn't know who or why.
WHAT'S TROUBLING YOU NOW?
AH, SOMETHING JUST DOESN'T ADD UP...
I MEAN, LUNA'S HIDING OUT, OBVIOUSLY SCARED FOR HIS LIFE... HE'S GOT A SHOTGUN BY THE DOOR...
SO WHY DOES HE LEAVE IT THERE WHEN HE LETS SOMEONE IN?
WELL, IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMEBODY HE TRUSTED.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN WHY IS HE STILL WALKING AROUND WITH THE OTHER GUN... WHICH HE PUTS DOWN TO MAKE A SANDWICH?
DON'T THE POLICE THINK IT WAS JASON PULLWALTER? KNUT SAID HE HAD MITCHELL LUNA'S BLOOD ON HIM, AND HIS PRINTS WERE ON THE KNIFE...
YEAH, BUT WHY WOULD PULLWALTER KILL HIM? AND IF HE WAS GOING TO, WHY NOT JUST SHOOT HIM? HE HAD NO PROBLEM TAKIN' A FEW SHOTS AT US...

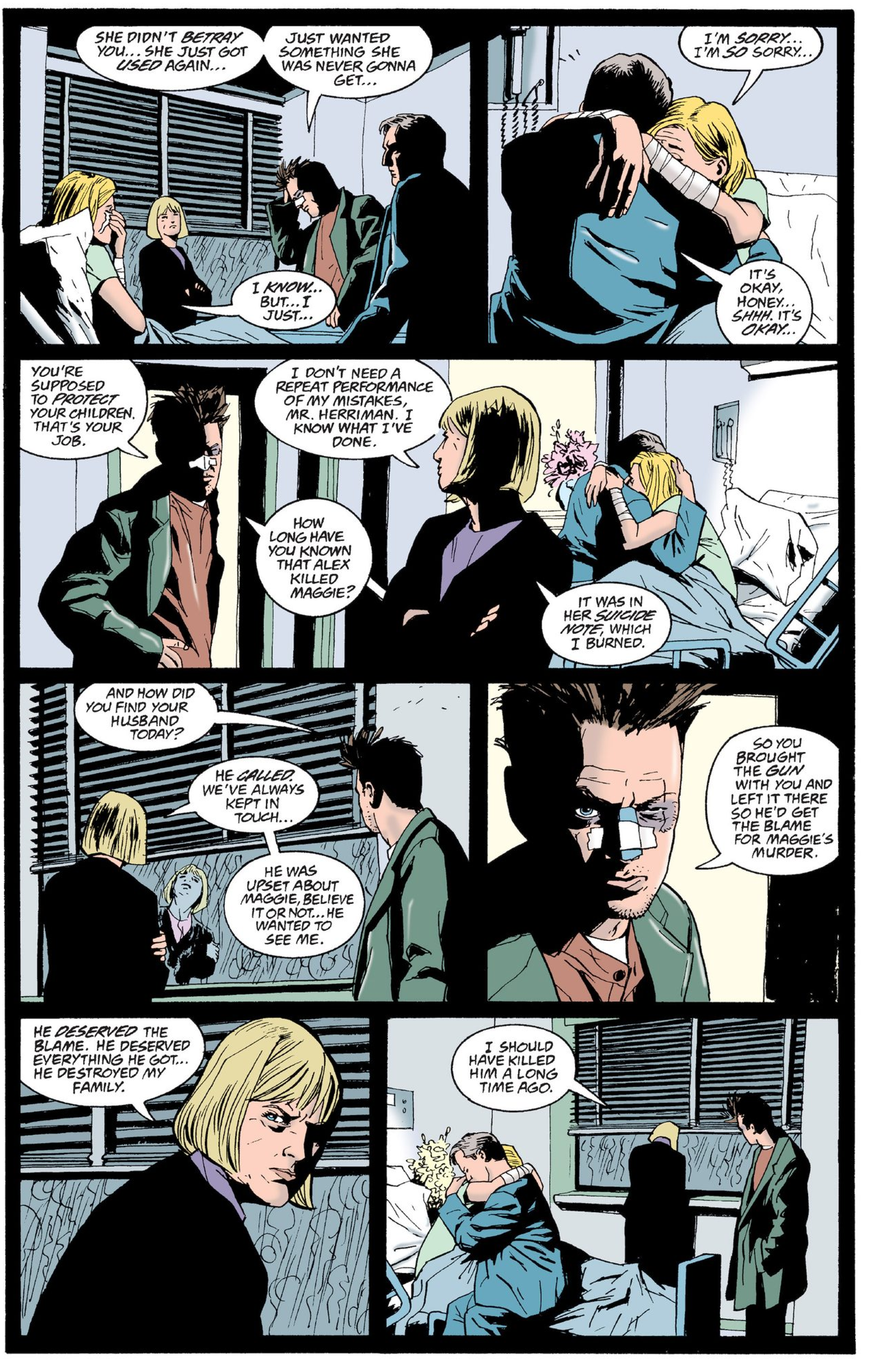

NO. SOMEBODY STABBED LUNA IN THE THROAT AND CHEST WHILE HE WAS STANDING RIGHT *NEXT* TO A LOADED GUN... IT DOESN'T FIT.
UNLESS THE GUN WASN'T THERE UNTIL *AFTER* HE WAS DEAD.
RIGHT!
BUT THEN WHOEVER LEFT THAT GUN KILLED MAGGIE *AND* LUNA... AND HAD TO BE SOMEONE HE TRUSTED ENOUGH TO LET INTO HIS HIDEOUT... SOMEONE WHO COULD GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO HIM TO--
And suddenly I realized the answer had been in front of me the whole time, I just hadn't been paying enough attention...
CK HERRIMAN
I looked through the old Earthlings police report Whitey had sent over yesterday and made one quick phone call to confirm my suspicions.
And then I was out the door, head full of steam, everything finally making sense... in all this senselessness.

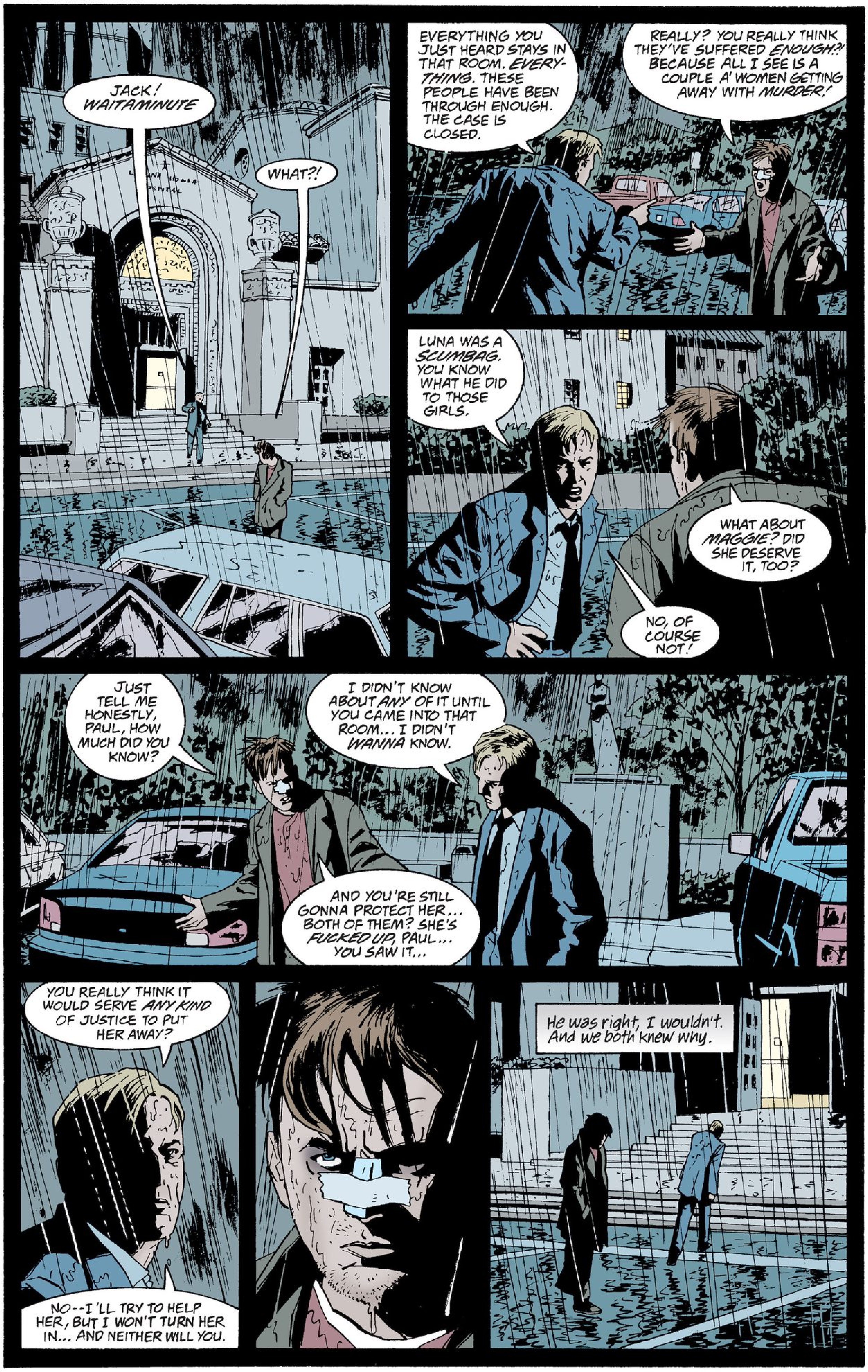
Chapter Twenty


WHAT, NO CHAMPAGNE? I WOULD'VE THOUGHT YOU'D ALL BE *CELEBRATING*.
WHAT IS IT *NOW*, MR. HERRIMAN?
YEAH, WHAT THE HELL'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
DON'T BOTHER PLAYING DUMB, PAUL... I'M SICK OF IT ALL...
YOU KNOW, I ALMOST GAVE UP ON THIS WHOLE THING. BUT SOMETHING ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LUNA AND VIRGIL PETERSON JUST DIDN'T FIT. KEPT NAGGING AT ME...
THEN I REMEMBERED SOMETHING *MAGGIE* HAD SAID THAT NIGHT. SHE SAID SHE WAS LOOKING FOR A "*PIECE OF HER FATHER*."
I MEAN, IT WAS SO OBVIOUS-- THE SIMPLEST ANSWER IS USUALLY THE *TRUTH*, RIGHT, PAUL?
WHAT'S YOUR *POINT*, JACK?
LUNA WASN'T VIRGIL PETERSON, HE WAS THEIR *FATHER*... GEOFF JORDAN.
BUT GEOFF DIED IN THE FIRE, HE--
NO. A LOT OF PEOPLE DIED IN THAT FIRE, BUT *NOT* YOUR HUSBAND. I'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THE FILES ON THE EARTHLINGS. I KNOW GEOFF WAS IN THE GROUP OF MEN BEING INVESTIGATED BY THE POLICE.
THAT HE WAS *RAPING* HIS OWN DAUGHTERS.
SO YOU IDENTIFIED SOMEONE ELSE'S CORPSE SO HE COULD ESCAPE PROSECUTION?
YOU LET HIM GET AWAY WITH IT? YOU *COVERED* FOR HIM?
I... WELL... HE WAS MY HUSBAND...
IT WAS *VIRGIL'S* FAULT. HE HAD TOO MUCH *CONTROL* OVER GEOFF AND THE OTHERS... THEY WORSHIPPED HIM.
GEOFF JUST WANTED ANOTHER CHANCE. SO I HELPED HIM GET IT... I WAS TRYING TO GIVE US *ALL* A SECOND CHANCE.

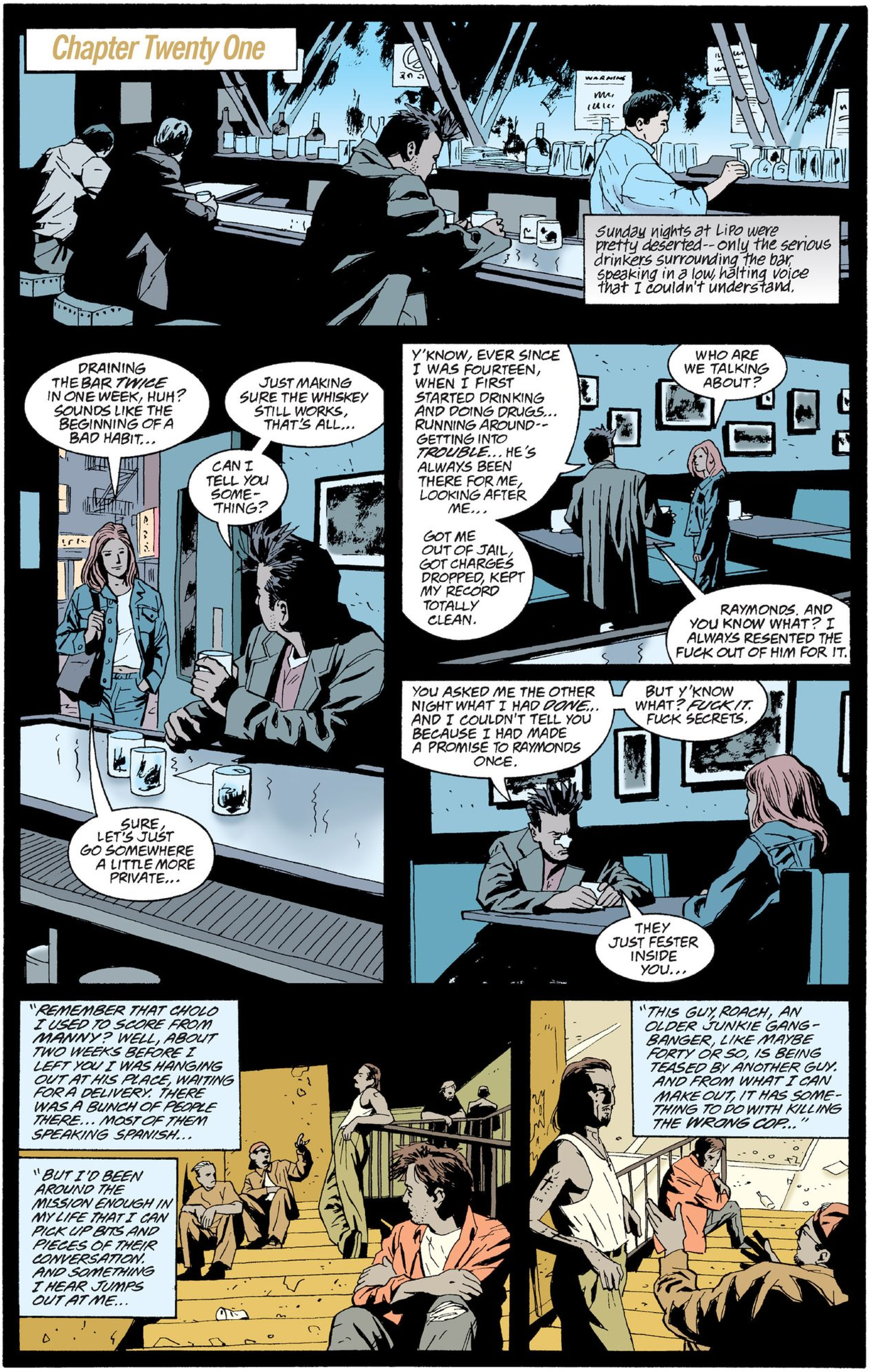

WELL, IT DIDN'T *WORK*, DID IT? GROWING UP IN THAT FUCKING CULT HAD SCREWED YOUR KIDS UP *ROYALLY*... MAGGIE WAS AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN, AND ALEX...
DIDN'T YOU GO AFTER MOM WITH A BUTCHER KNIFE?
SHE DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING... JUST LOST HER TEMPER...
SO WHAT WAS THE DEAL? WAS MAGGIE SUPPOSED TO KILL YOUR DAD?
IT WAS A POSSIBILITY... WE WEREN'T EVEN SURE IT WAS *HIM* AT FIRST.
I SAW AN ARTICLE ABOUT LUNARHOUSE IN THE WEEKLY, AND HIS PICTURE LOOKED FAMILIAR.
SO WE DECIDED THAT SHE'D JOIN FOR A FEW DAYS, TO GET CLOSE TO HIM AND FIND OUT.
AND THEN SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO CALL ME SO WE COULD FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO, BUT SHE DIDN'T...
AND WHY DIDN'T SHE? DID SHE TELL YOU *THAT* WEDNESDAY NIGHT IN HER MOTEL ROOM?
OKAY, JACK. THAT'S *ENOUGH*.
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE *WAS*!
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, BUT THEN I *REMEMBERED* THAT YOU'VE GOT *CALLER ID*. AND I CALLED YOU FROM THE MOTEL.
THE CLERK GOT A CALL AROUND 1:00 A.M. THAT NIGHT. A WOMAN ASKING FOR DIRECTIONS. THAT WAS *YOU*. YOU DROVE RIGHT DOWN TO SEE YOUR SISTER TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON.
AND THEN WHAT? YOU LOSE YOUR *TEMPER* AGAIN?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS...
I JUST WANTED TO *TALK*...
...TO SEE WHAT HAPPENED...

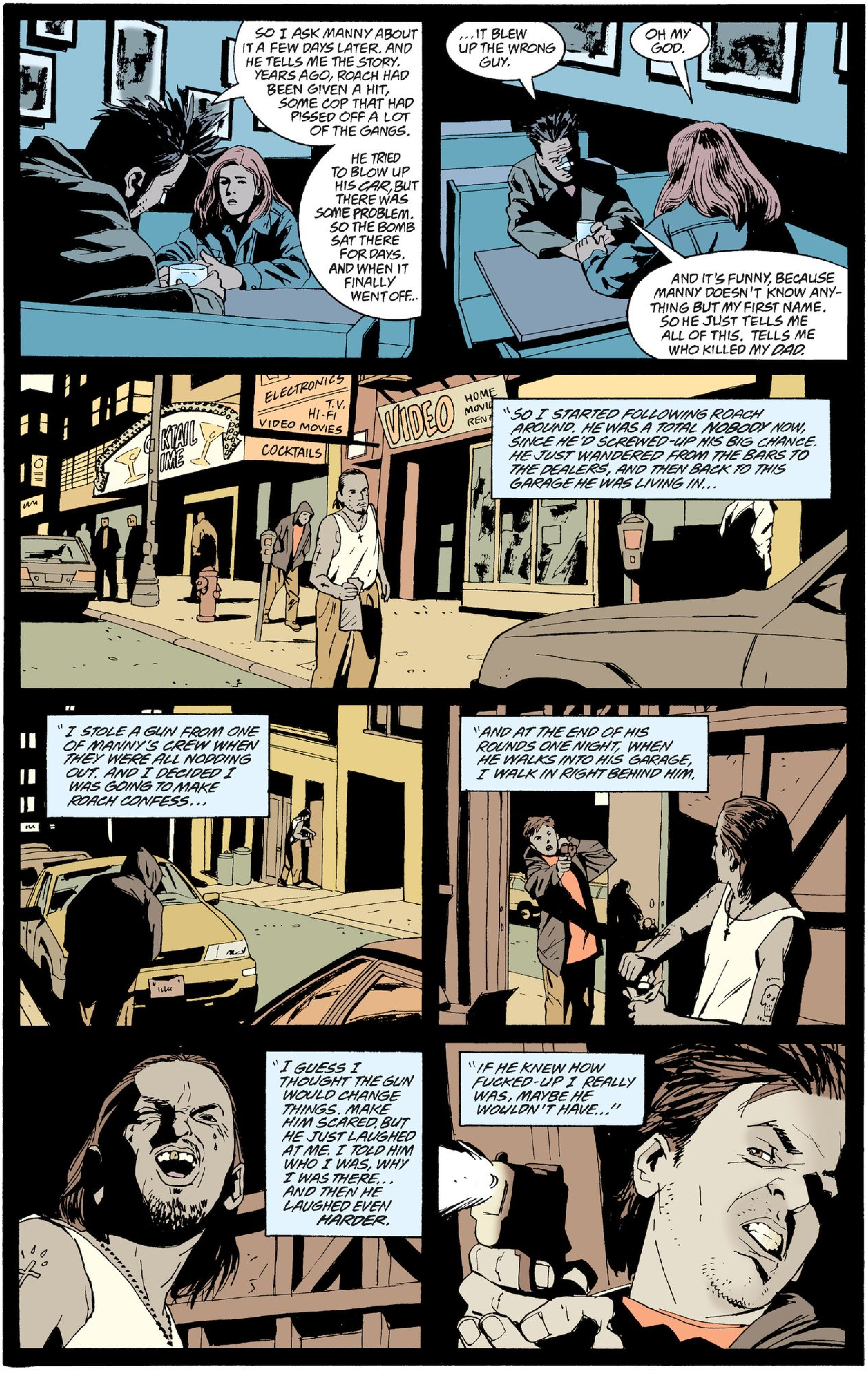

"I SAW YOU DROP HER OFF, AND YOUR DISGUSTING FLIRTING WITH EACH OTHER... THAT WAS SO LIKE HER.
"AND THEN WHEN SHE ANSWERED THE DOOR, SHE WAS ON THE PHONE WITH HIM... FATHER.
"HE HAD GIVEN HER SOME MONEY, CHILD SUPPORT HE CALLED IT, AND SHE WANTED TO RETURN IT. SAID SHE DIDN'T WANT REVENGE ANYMORE...
"AFTER EVERYTHING THAT BASTARD HAD DONE, SHE JUST WANTED TO DROP IT.
"AND THEN SHE ADMITTED IT... THAT SHE'D SLEPT WITH HIM. BY CHOICE. THEN I KNEW SHE HAD COMPLETELY BETRAYED ME.
"THE GUN WAS JUST SITTING ON THE BED...
"THEN I CALLED HIM, AND I TOLD HIM WHAT HAD HAPPENED. AND WHAT HE HAD DONE TO BOTH OF US... WITH HIS LATE-NIGHT VISITS... CRAWLING INTO MY BED, OFFERING ME TO HIS FRIENDS..."

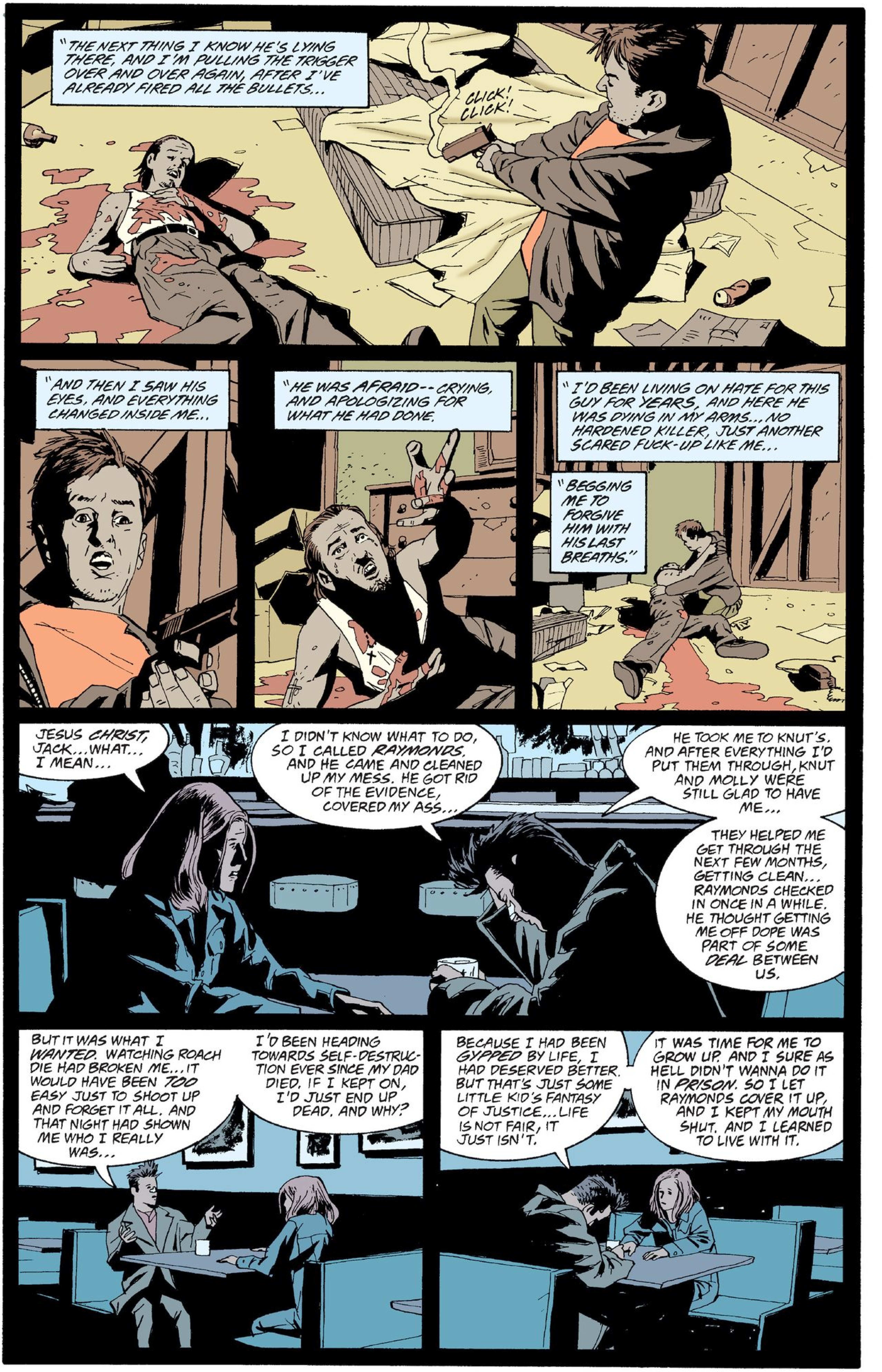

SHE DIDN'T *BETRAY* YOU... SHE JUST GOT *USED* AGAIN...
JUST WANTED SOMETHING SHE WAS NEVER GONNA GET...
I *KNOW*... BUT... I JUST...
I'M *SORRY*... I'M *SO* SORRY...
IT'S OKAY, HONEY... *SHHH.* IT'S *OKAY*...
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO *PROTECT* YOUR CHILDREN. THAT'S YOUR JOB.
I DON'T NEED A REPEAT PERFORMANCE OF MY MISTAKES, MR. HERRIMAN. I KNOW WHAT I'VE DONE.
HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN THAT ALEX KILLED MAGGIE?
IT WAS IN HER *SUICIDE NOTE*, WHICH I BURNED.
AND HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR HUSBAND TODAY?
HE *CALLED*. WE'VE ALWAYS KEPT IN TOUCH...
HE WAS UPSET ABOUT MAGGIE, BELIEVE IT OR NOT... HE WANTED TO SEE ME.
SO YOU BROUGHT THE *GUN* WITH YOU AND LEFT IT THERE SO HE'D GET THE BLAME FOR MAGGIE'S MURDER.
HE *DESERVED* THE BLAME. HE DESERVED EVERYTHING HE GOT... HE DESTROYED MY FAMILY.
I SHOULD HAVE KILLED HIM A LONG TIME AGO.

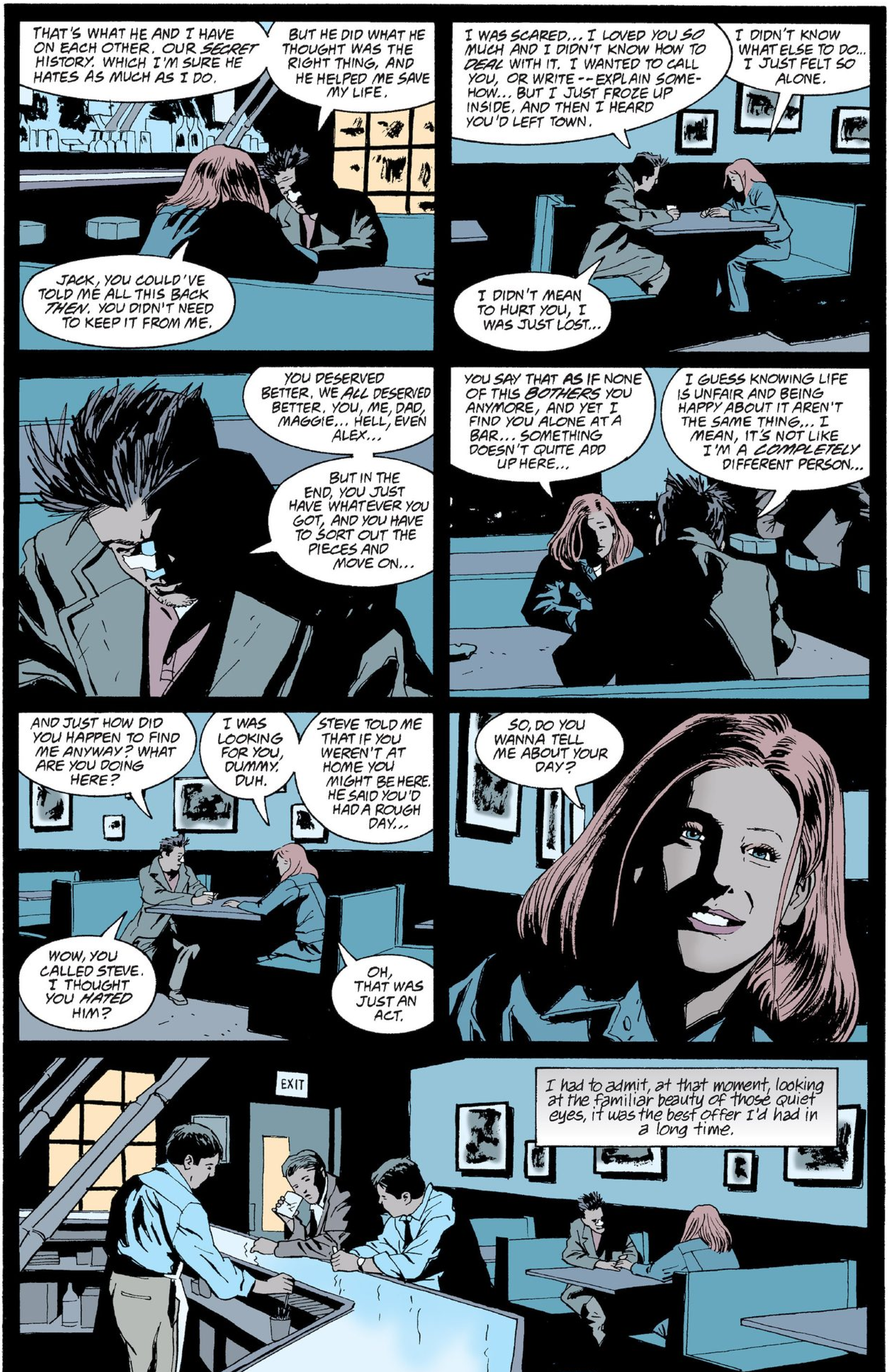

JACK! WAITAMINUTE
WHAT?!
EVERYTHING YOU JUST HEARD STAYS IN THAT ROOM. EVERYTHING. THESE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN THROUGH ENOUGH. THE CASE IS CLOSED.
REALLY? YOU REALLY THINK THEY'VE SUFFERED ENOUGH?! BECAUSE ALL I SEE IS A COUPLE A' WOMEN GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER!
LUNA WAS A SCUMBAG. YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID TO THOSE GIRLS.
WHAT ABOUT MAGGIE? DID SHE DESERVE IT, TOO?
NO, OF COURSE NOT!
JUST TELL ME HONESTLY, PAUL, HOW MUCH DID YOU KNOW?
I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ANY OF IT UNTIL YOU CAME INTO THAT ROOM... I DIDN'T WANNA KNOW.
AND YOU'RE STILL GONNA PROTECT HER... BOTH OF THEM? SHE'S FUCKED UP, PAUL... YOU SAW IT...
YOU REALLY THINK IT WOULD SERVE ANY KIND OF JUSTICE TO PUT HER AWAY?
NO--I'LL TRY TO HELP HER, BUT I WON'T TURN HER IN... AND NEITHER WILL YOU.
He was right, I wouldn't. And we both knew why.

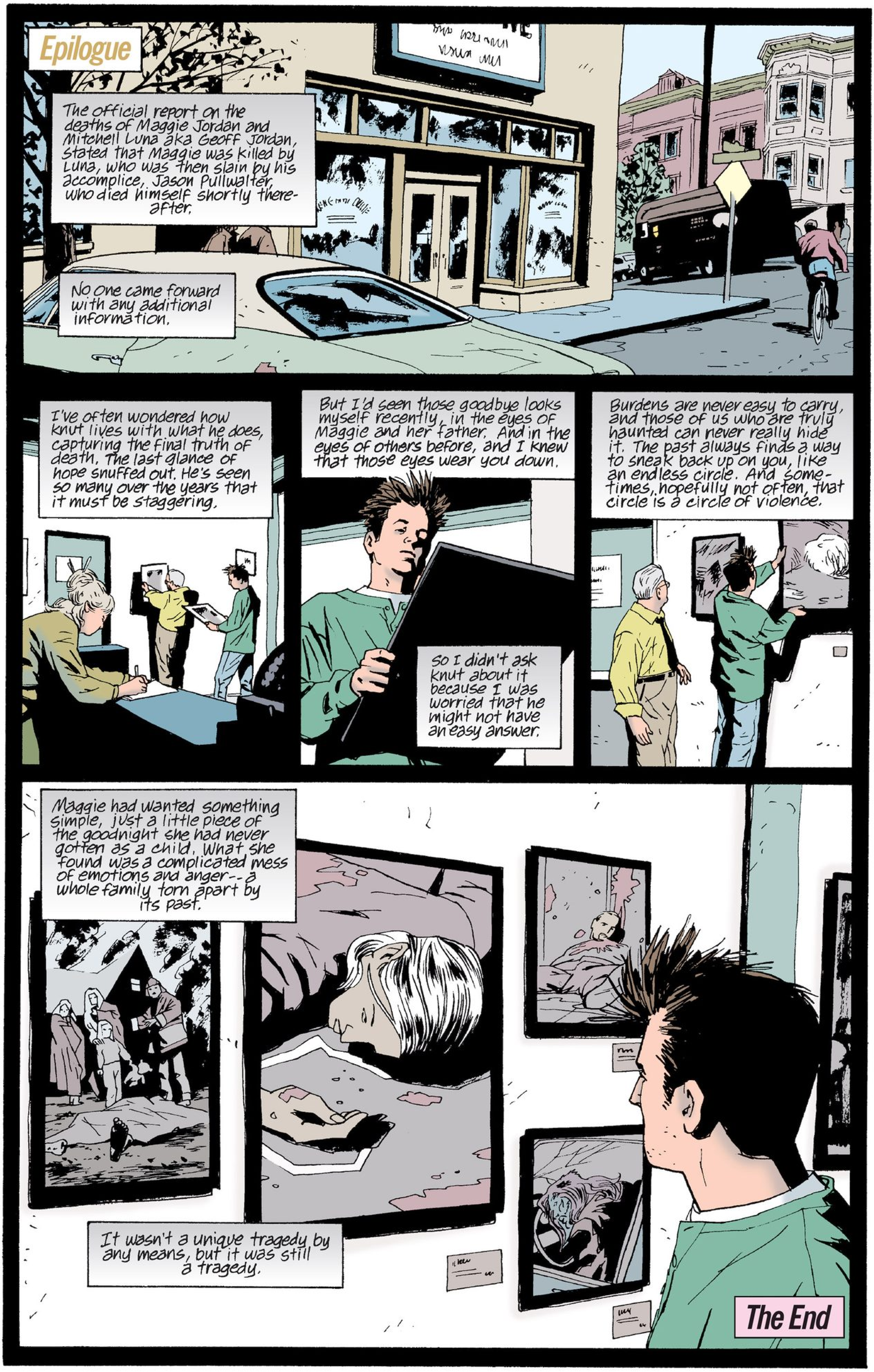
Chapter Twenty One


Sunday nights at Lipo were pretty deserted-- only the serious drinkers surrounding the bar, speaking in a low, halting voice that I couldn't understand.
DRAINING THE BAR TWICE IN ONE WEEK, HUH? SOUNDS LIKE THE BEGINNING OF A BAD HABIT...
JUST MAKING SURE THE WHISKEY STILL WORKS, THAT'S ALL...
CAN I TELL YOU SOMETHING?
SURE, LET'S JUST GO SOMEWHERE A LITTLE MORE PRIVATE...
Y'KNOW, EVER SINCE I WAS FOURTEEN, WHEN I FIRST STARTED DRINKING AND DOING DRUGS... RUNNING AROUND-- GETTING INTO TROUBLE... HE'S ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME, LOOKING AFTER ME...
WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?
GOT ME OUT OF JAIL, GOT CHARGES DROPPED, KEPT MY RECORD TOTALLY CLEAN.
RAYMONDS. AND YOU KNOW WHAT? I ALWAYS RESENTED THE FUCK OUT OF HIM FOR IT.
YOU ASKED ME THE OTHER NIGHT WHAT I HAD DONE... AND I COULDN'T TELL YOU BECAUSE I HAD MADE A PROMISE TO RAYMONDS ONCE.
BUT Y'KNOW WHAT? FUCK IT. FUCK SECRETS.
THEY JUST FESTER INSIDE YOU...
"REMEMBER THAT CHOLO I USED TO SCORE FROM MANNY? WELL, ABOUT TWO WEEKS BEFORE I LEFT YOU I WAS HANGING OUT AT HIS PLACE, WAITING FOR A DELIVERY. THERE WAS A BUNCH OF PEOPLE THERE... MOST OF THEM SPEAKING SPANISH...
"BUT I'D BEEN AROUND THE MISSION ENOUGH IN MY LIFE THAT I CAN PICK UP BITS AND PIECES OF THEIR CONVERSATION. AND SOMETHING I HEAR JUMPS OUT AT ME...
"THIS GUY, ROACH, AN OLDER JUNKIE GANG-BANGER, LIKE MAYBE FORTY OR SO, IS BEING TEASED BY ANOTHER GUY. AND FROM WHAT I CAN MAKE OUT, IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH KILLING THE WRONG COP..."


SO I ASK MANNY ABOUT IT A FEW DAYS LATER. AND HE TELLS ME THE STORY. YEARS AGO, ROACH HAD BEEN GIVEN A HIT, SOME COP THAT HAD PISSED OFF A LOT OF THE GANGS.
HE TRIED TO BLOW UP HIS *CAR*, BUT THERE WAS SOME PROBLEM. SO THE BOMB SAT THERE FOR DAYS. AND WHEN IT FINALLY WENT OFF..
...IT BLEW UP THE WRONG GUY.
OH MY GOD.
AND IT'S FUNNY, BECAUSE MANNY DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING BUT MY FIRST NAME. SO HE JUST TELLS ME ALL OF THIS. TELLS ME WHO KILLED MY *DAD*.
ELECTRONICS T.V. HI-FI VIDEO MOVIES
COCKTAIL TIME
COCKTAILS
VIDEO
HOME MOVIES RENT
"SO I STARTED FOLLOWING ROACH AROUND. HE WAS A TOTAL *NOBODY* NOW, SINCE HE'D SCREWED-UP HIS BIG CHANCE. HE JUST WANDERED FROM THE BARS TO THE DEALERS, AND THEN BACK TO THIS GARAGE HE WAS LIVING IN...
"I STOLE A GUN FROM ONE OF MANNY'S CREW WHEN THEY WERE ALL NODDING OUT. AND I DECIDED I WAS GOING TO MAKE ROACH CONFESS...
"AND AT THE END OF HIS ROUNDS ONE NIGHT, WHEN HE WALKS INTO HIS GARAGE, I WALK IN RIGHT BEHIND HIM.
"I GUESS I THOUGHT THE GUN WOULD CHANGE THINGS. MAKE HIM SCARED. BUT HE JUST LAUGHED AT ME. I TOLD HIM WHO I WAS, WHY I WAS THERE.. AND THEN HE LAUGHED EVEN *HARDER*.
"IF HE KNEW HOW FUCKED-UP I REALLY WAS, MAYBE HE WOULDN'T HAVE..."


"THE NEXT THING I KNOW HE'S LYING THERE, AND I'M PULLING THE TRIGGER OVER AND OVER AGAIN, AFTER I'VE ALREADY FIRED ALL THE BULLETS...
CLICK! CLICK!
"AND THEN I SAW HIS EYES, AND EVERYTHING CHANGED INSIDE ME...
"HE WAS AFRAID--CRYING, AND APOLOGIZING FOR WHAT HE HAD DONE.
"I'D BEEN LIVING ON HATE FOR THIS GUY FOR YEARS, AND HERE HE WAS DYING IN MY ARMS... NO HARDENED KILLER, JUST ANOTHER SCARED FUCK-UP LIKE ME...
"BEGGING ME TO FORGIVE HIM WITH HIS LAST BREATHS."
JESUS CHRIST, JACK... WHAT... I MEAN...
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, SO I CALLED RAYMONDS. AND HE CAME AND CLEANED UP MY MESS. HE GOT RID OF THE EVIDENCE, COVERED MY ASS...
HE TOOK ME TO KNUT'S. AND AFTER EVERYTHING I'D PUT THEM THROUGH, KNUT AND MOLLY WERE STILL GLAD TO HAVE ME...
THEY HELPED ME GET THROUGH THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, GETTING CLEAN... RAYMONDS CHECKED IN ONCE IN A WHILE. HE THOUGHT GETTING ME OFF DOPE WAS PART OF SOME DEAL BETWEEN US.
BUT IT WAS WHAT I WANTED. WATCHING ROACH DIE HAD BROKEN ME... IT WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO EASY JUST TO SHOOT UP AND FORGET IT ALL. AND THAT NIGHT HAD SHOWN ME WHO I REALLY WAS...
I'D BEEN HEADING TOWARDS SELF-DESTRUCTION EVER SINCE MY DAD DIED. IF I KEPT ON, I'D JUST END UP DEAD. AND WHY?
BECAUSE I HAD BEEN GYPPED BY LIFE, I HAD DESERVED BETTER. BUT THAT'S JUST SOME LITTLE KID'S FANTASY OF JUSTICE... LIFE IS NOT FAIR, IT JUST ISN'T.
IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO GROW UP. AND I SURE AS HELL DIDN'T WANNA DO IT IN PRISON. SO I LET RAYMONDS COVER IT UP, AND I KEPT MY MOUTH SHUT. AND I LEARNED TO LIVE WITH IT.


THAT'S WHAT HE AND I HAVE ON EACH OTHER. OUR *SECRET* HISTORY. WHICH I'M SURE HE HATES AS MUCH AS I DO.
BUT HE DID WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS THE RIGHT THING, AND HE HELPED ME SAVE MY LIFE.
JACK, YOU COULD'VE TOLD ME ALL THIS BACK *THEN*. YOU DIDN'T NEED TO KEEP IT FROM ME.
I WAS SCARED... I LOVED YOU *SO* MUCH AND I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO *DEAL* WITH IT. I WANTED TO CALL YOU, OR WRITE -- EXPLAIN SOMEHOW... BUT I JUST FROZE UP INSIDE, AND THEN I HEARD YOU'D LEFT TOWN.
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO... I JUST FELT SO ALONE.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT YOU, I WAS JUST LOST...
YOU DESERVED BETTER. WE *ALL* DESERVED BETTER. YOU, ME, DAD, MAGGIE... HELL, EVEN ALEX...
BUT IN THE END, YOU JUST HAVE WHATEVER YOU GOT, AND YOU HAVE TO SORT OUT THE PIECES AND MOVE ON...
YOU *SAY* THAT **AS IF** NONE OF THIS *BOTHERS* YOU ANYMORE, AND YET I FIND YOU ALONE AT A BAR... SOMETHING DOESN'T QUITE ADD UP HERE...
I GUESS KNOWING LIFE IS UNFAIR AND BEING HAPPY ABOUT IT AREN'T THE SAME THING... I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M A *COMPLETELY* DIFFERENT PERSON...
AND JUST HOW DID YOU HAPPEN TO FIND ME ANYWAY? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU, DUMMY. DUH.
STEVE TOLD ME THAT IF YOU WEREN'T AT HOME YOU MIGHT BE HERE. HE SAID YOU'D HAD A ROUGH DAY...
WOW, YOU CALLED STEVE. I THOUGHT YOU *HATED* HIM?
OH, THAT WAS JUST AN ACT.
SO, DO YOU WANNA TELL ME ABOUT YOUR DAY?
EXIT
I had to admit, at that moment, looking at the familiar beauty of those quiet eyes, it was the best offer I'd had in a long time.


Epilogue
The official report on the deaths of Maggie Jordan and Mitchell Luna aka Geoff Jordan, stated that Maggie was killed by Luna, who was then slain by his accomplice, Jason Pullwalter, who died himself shortly thereafter.
No one came forward with any additional information.
I've often wondered how Knut lives with what he does, capturing the final truth of death. The last glance of hope snuffed out. He's seen so many over the years that it must be staggering.
But I'd seen those goodbye looks myself recently, in the eyes of Maggie and her father. And in the eyes of others before, and I knew that those eyes wear you down.
So I didn't ask Knut about it because I was worried that he might not have an easy answer.
Burdens are never easy to carry, and those of us who are truly haunted can never really hide it. The past always finds a way to sneak back up on you, like an endless circle. And sometimes, hopefully not often, that circle is a circle of violence.
Maggie had wanted something simple, just a little piece of the goodnight she had never gotten as a child. What she found was a complicated mess of emotions and anger-- a whole family torn apart by its past.
It wasn't a unique tragedy by any means, but it was still a tragedy.
The End

Original Series Covers

SCENE OF THE CRIME

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
100
JAMES

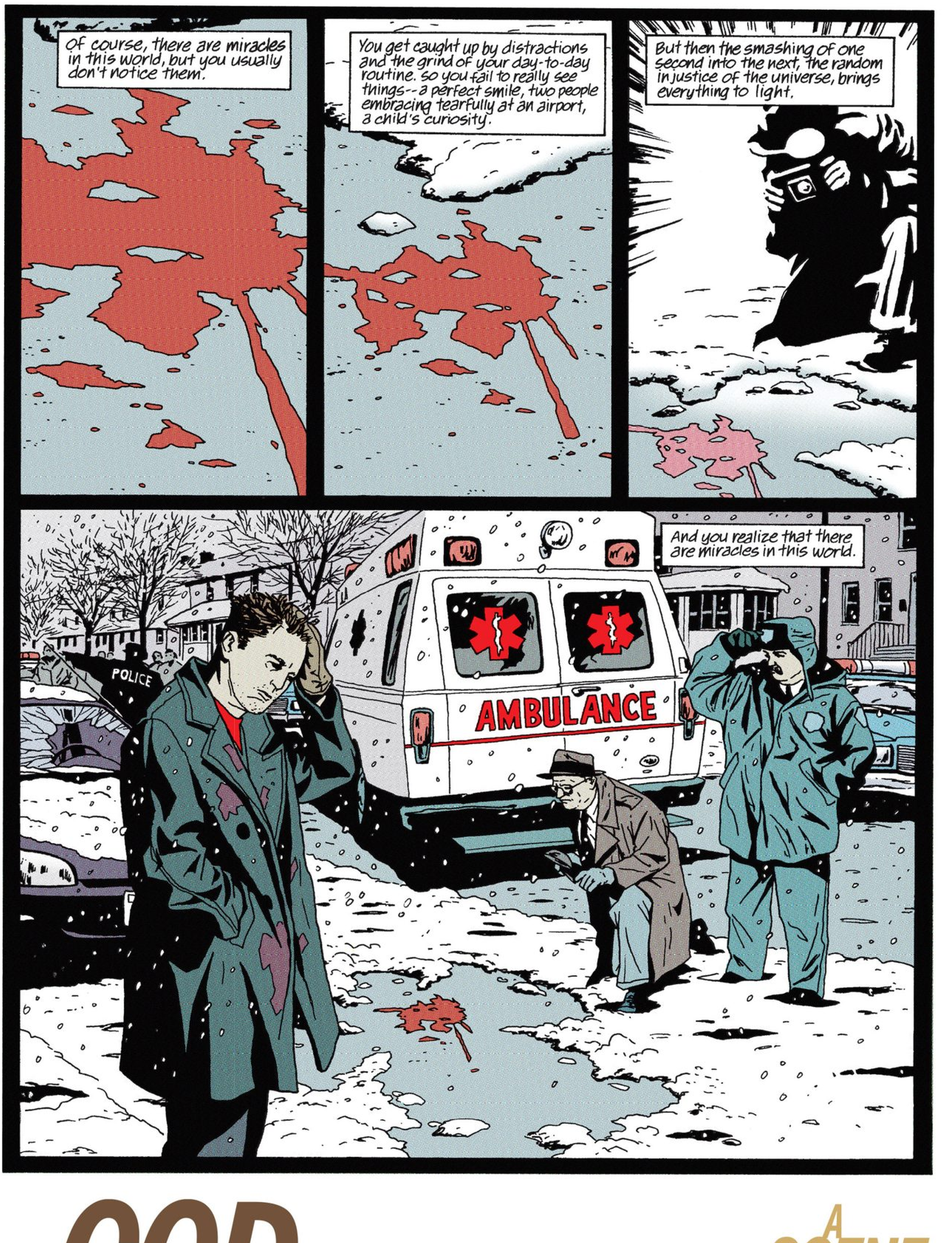
MLARK 99 JAMES

MLark '98
JAMES

The following story
originally appeared in
"VERTIGO WINTER'S EDGE"
a few months before the
series launched

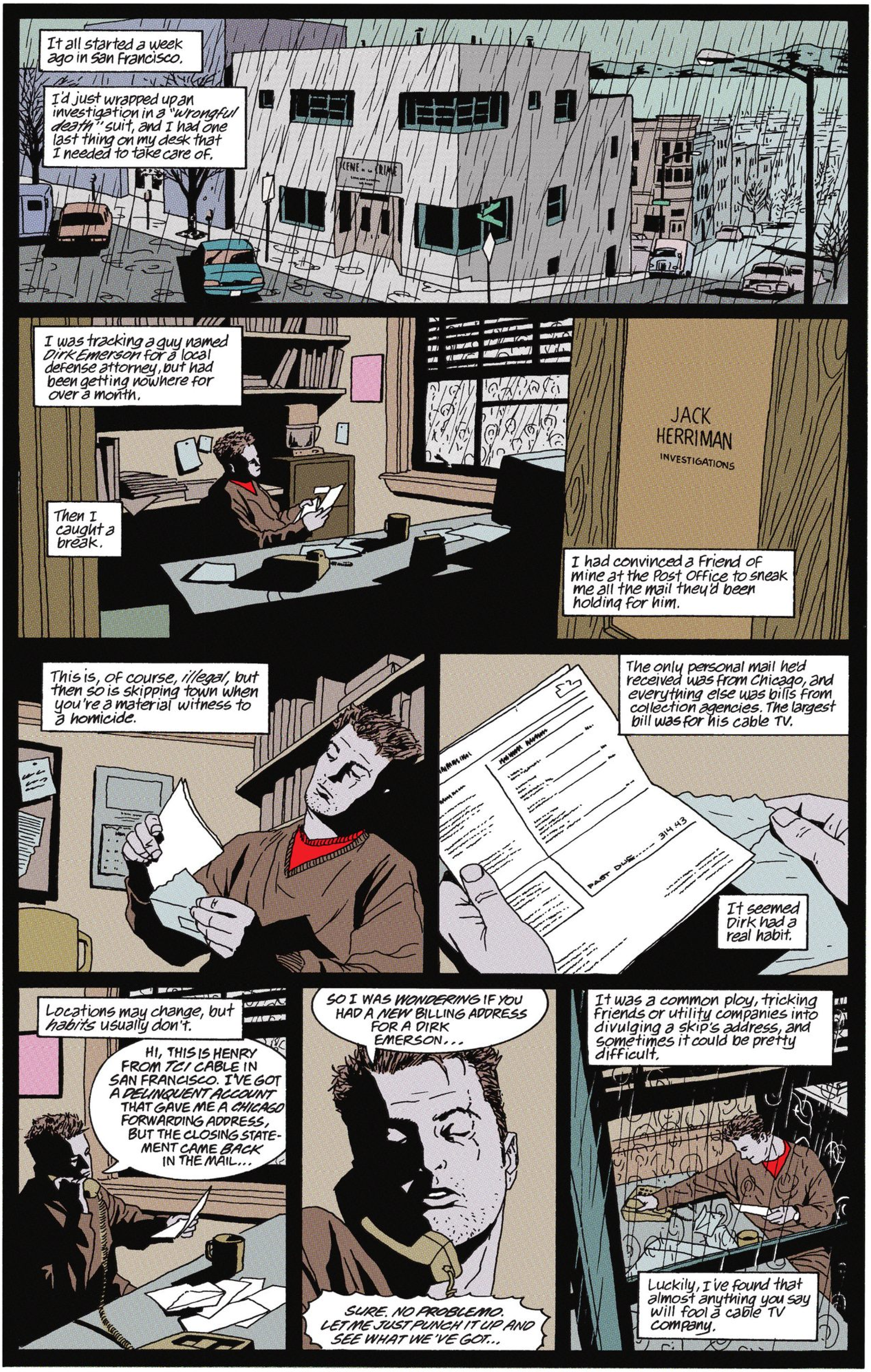
GOD AND SINNERS

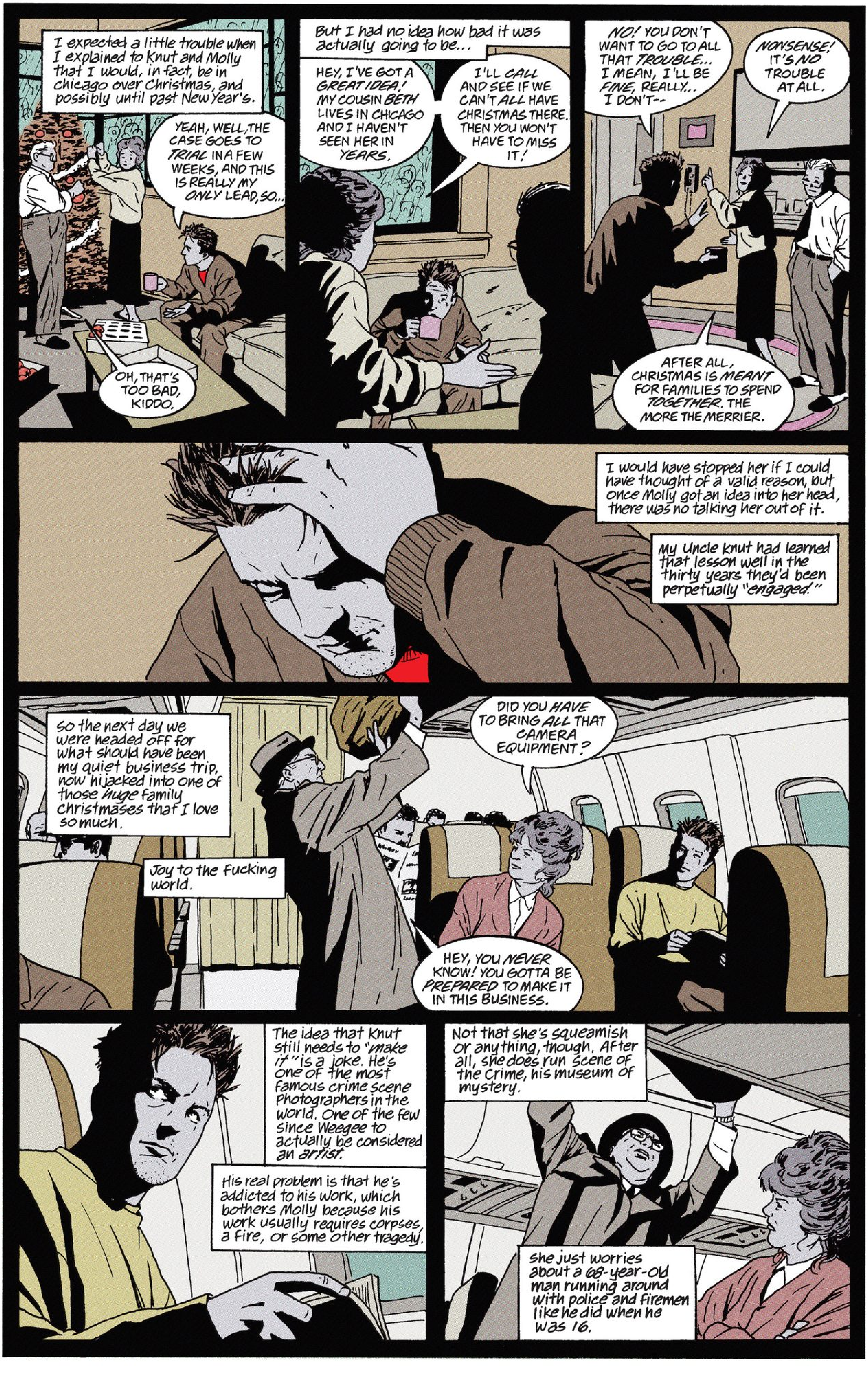
SCENE OF THE CRIME

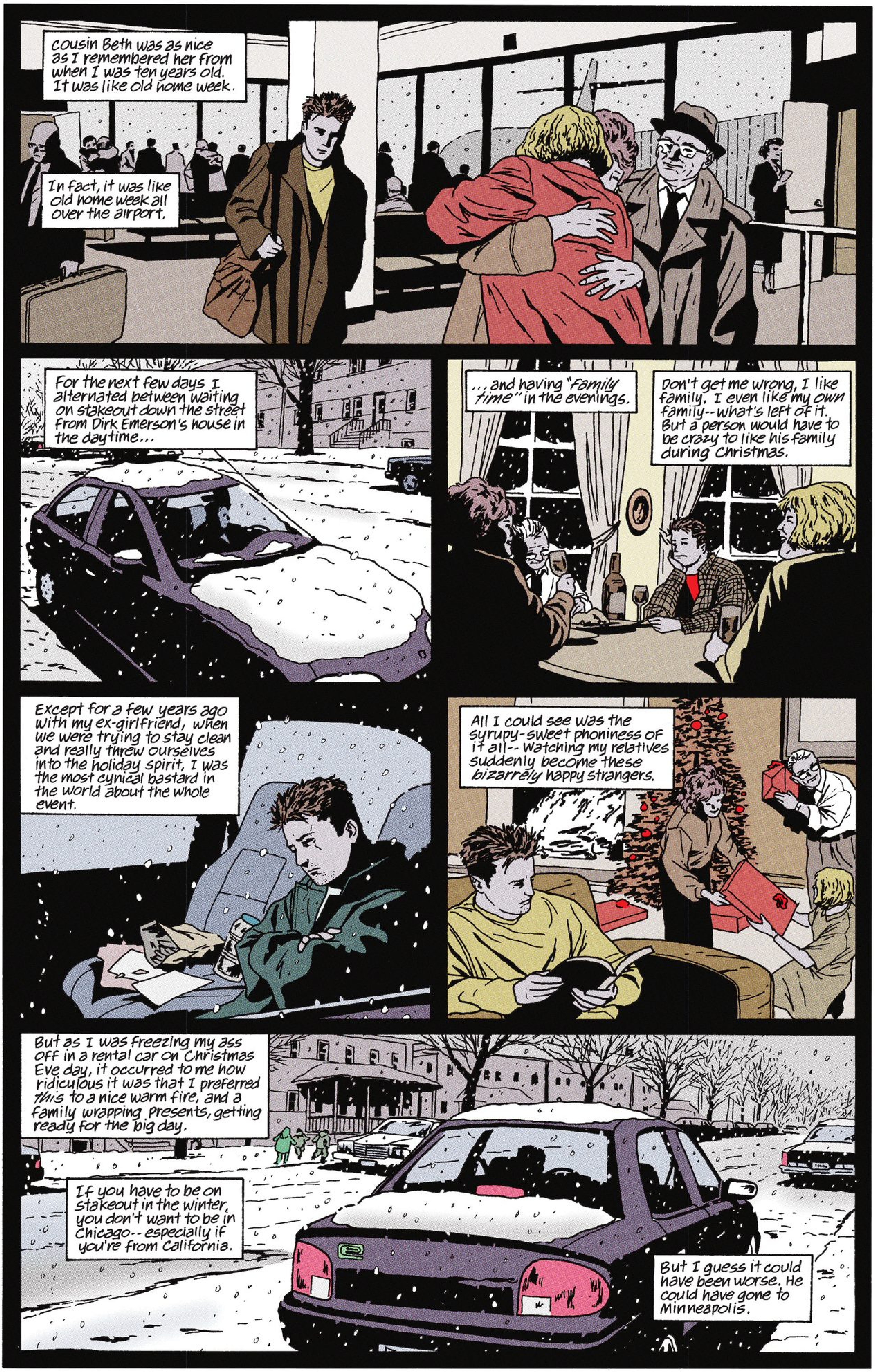

Of course, there are miracles in this world, but you usually don't notice them.
You get caught up by distractions and the grind of your day-to-day routine. so you fail to really see things-- a perfect smile, two people embracing tearfully at an airport, a child's curiosity.
But then the smashing of one second into the next, the random injustice of the universe, brings everything to light.
And you realize that there are miracles in this world.
POLICE
AMBULANCE

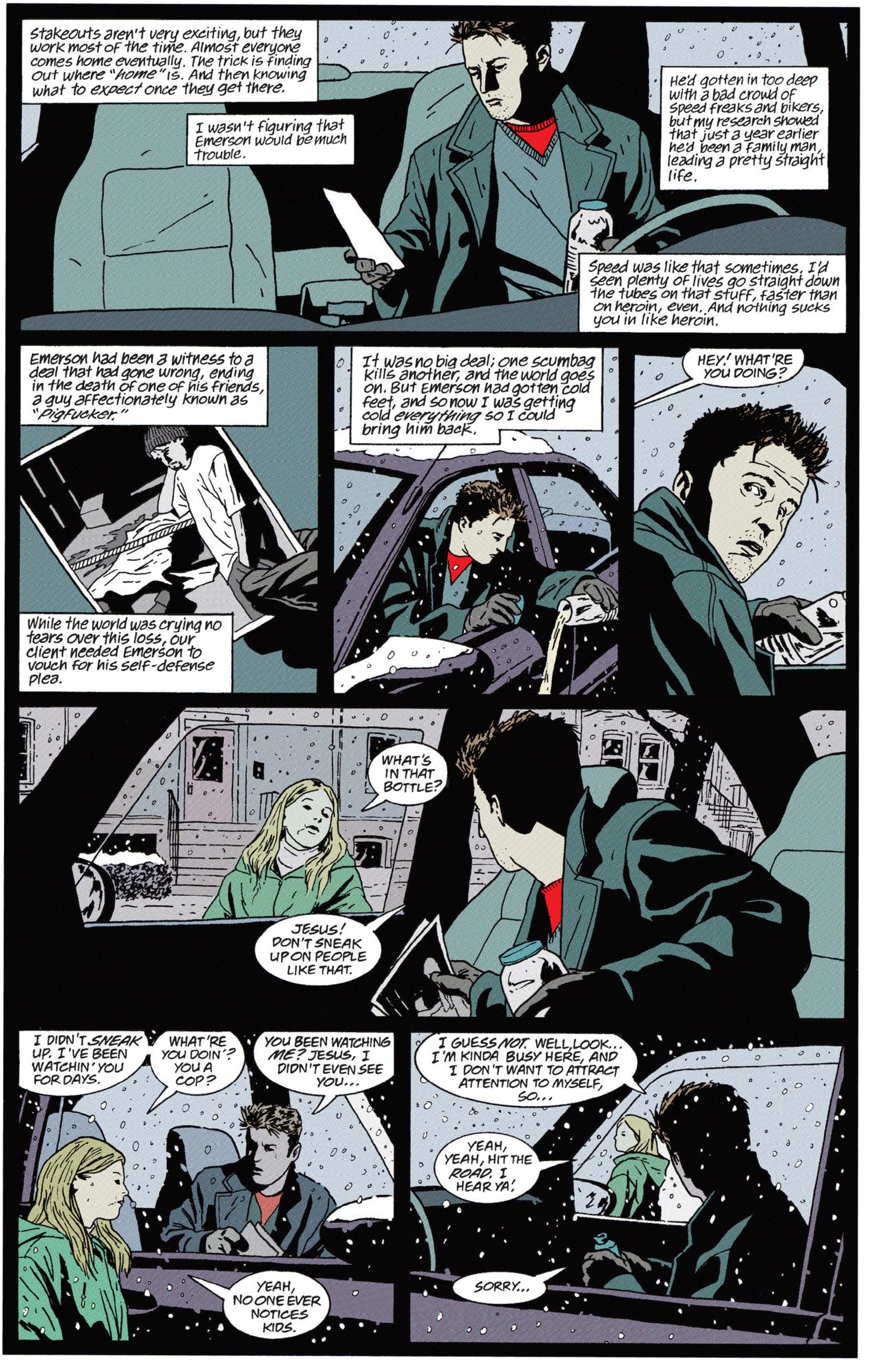
GOD AND SINNERS

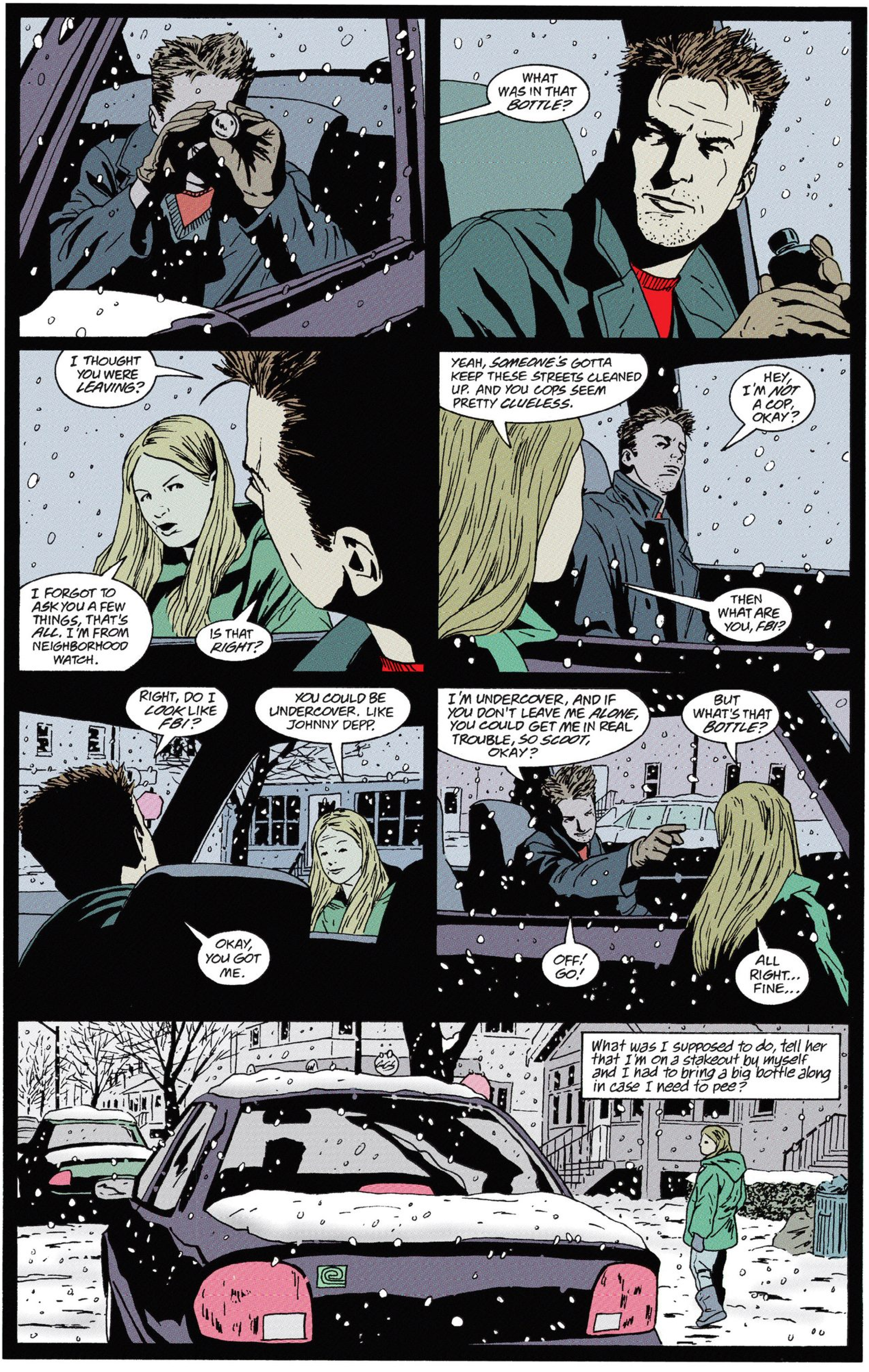
A SCENE OF THE CRIME
Christmas Mystery

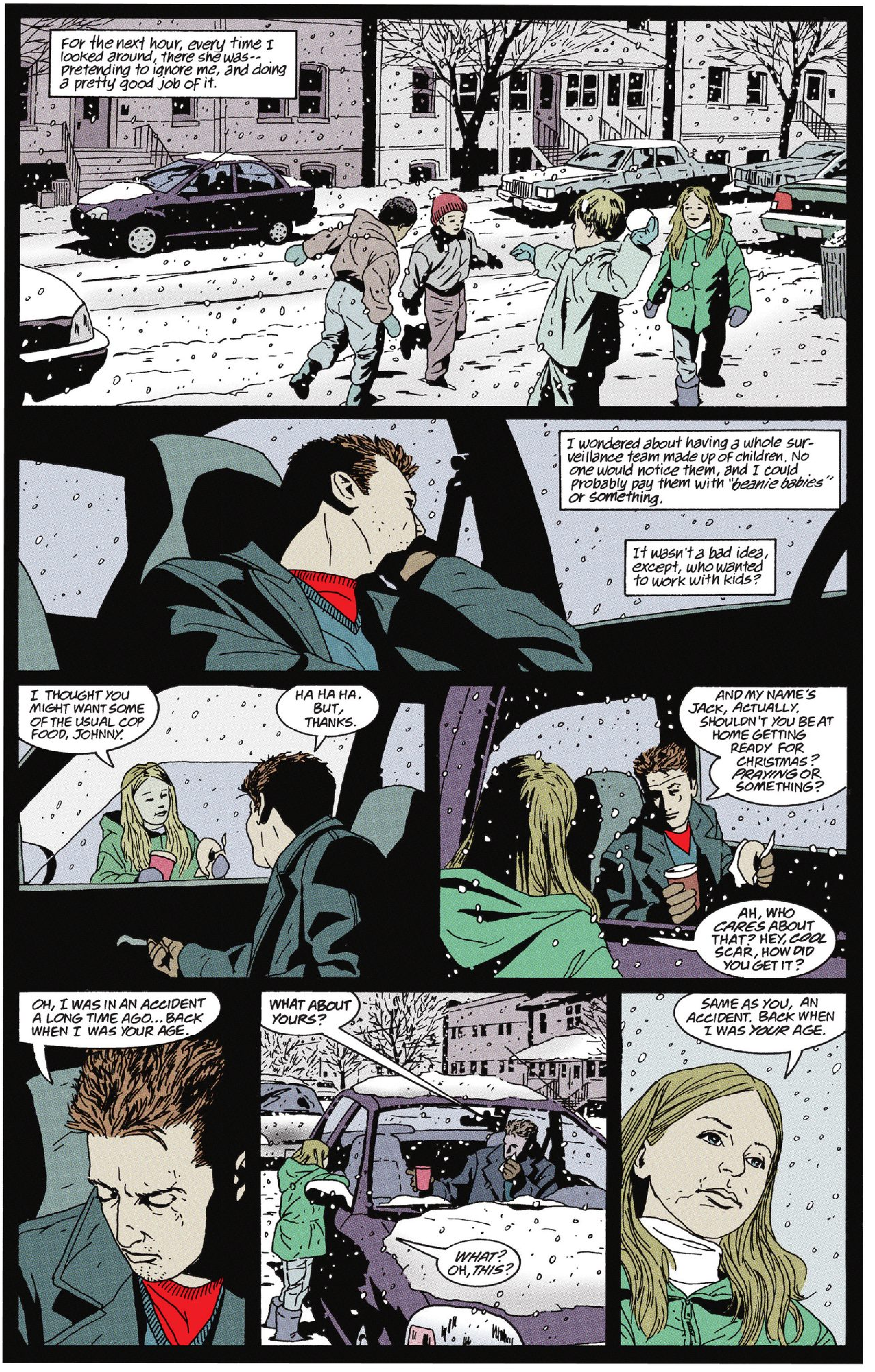

It all started a week ago in San Francisco.
I'd just wrapped up an investigation in a "wrongful death" suit, and I had one last thing on my desk that I needed to take care of.
I was tracking a guy named Dirk Emerson for a local defense attorney, but had been getting nowhere for over a month.
JACK HERRIMAN INVESTIGATIONS
Then I caught a break.
I had convinced a friend of mine at the Post Office to sneak me all the mail they'd been holding for him.
This is, of course, illegal, but then so is skipping town when you're a material witness to a homicide.
The only personal mail he'd received was from Chicago, and everything else was bills from collection agencies. The largest bill was for his cable TV.
PAST DUE...... 314.43
It seemed Dirk had a real habit.
Locations may change, but habits usually don't.
HI, THIS IS HENRY FROM TCI CABLE IN SAN FRANCISCO. I'VE GOT A DELINQUENT ACCOUNT THAT GAVE ME A CHICAGO FORWARDING ADDRESS, BUT THE CLOSING STATEMENT CAME BACK IN THE MAIL...
SO I WAS WONDERING IF YOU HAD A NEW BILLING ADDRESS FOR A DIRK EMERSON...
SURE. NO PROBLEMO. LET ME JUST PUNCH IT UP AND SEE WHAT WE'VE GOT...
It was a common ploy, tricking friends or utility companies into divulging a skip's address, and sometimes it could be pretty difficult.
Luckily, I've found that almost anything you say will fool a cable TV company.

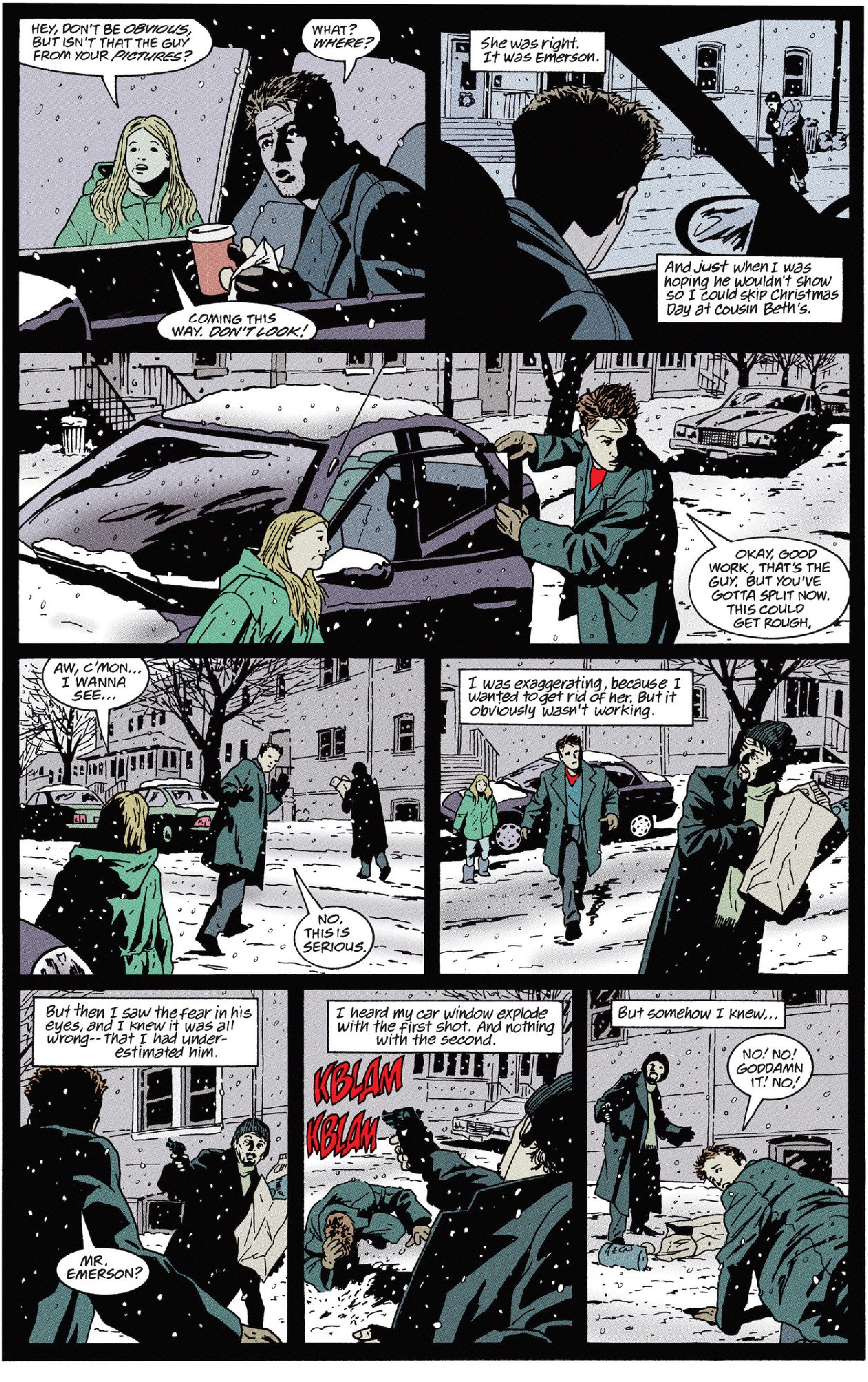

I expected a little trouble when I explained to Knut and Molly that I would, in fact, be in Chicago over Christmas, and possibly until past New Year's.
YEAH, WELL, THE CASE GOES TO *TRIAL* IN A FEW WEEKS, AND THIS IS REALLY MY *ONLY* LEAD, SO...
OH, THAT'S TOO BAD, KIDDO.
But I had no idea how bad it was actually going to be...
HEY, I'VE GOT A *GREAT IDEA!* MY COUSIN *BETH* LIVES IN CHICAGO AND I HAVEN'T SEEN HER IN *YEARS*.
I'LL *CALL* AND SEE IF WE CAN'T *ALL* HAVE CHRISTMAS THERE. THEN YOU WON'T HAVE TO MISS IT!
NO! YOU DON'T WANT TO GO TO ALL THAT *TROUBLE*... I MEAN, I'LL BE *FINE*, REALLY... I DON'T--
NONSENSE! IT'S *NO* TROUBLE AT ALL.
AFTER ALL, CHRISTMAS IS *MEANT* FOR FAMILIES TO SPEND *TOGETHER*. THE MORE THE MERRIER.
I would have stopped her if I could have thought of a valid reason, but once Molly got an idea into her head, there was no talking her out of it.
My Uncle Knut had learned that lesson well in the thirty years they'd been perpetually "*engaged.*"
So the next day we were headed off for what should have been my quiet business trip, now hijacked into one of those *huge* family Christmases that I love so much.
Joy to the fucking world.
DID YOU *HAVE* TO BRING *ALL* THAT CAMERA EQUIPMENT?
HEY, YOU *NEVER* KNOW! YOU GOTTA BE *PREPARED* TO MAKE IT IN THIS BUSINESS.
The idea that Knut still needs to "*make it*" is a joke. He's one of the most famous crime scene photographers in the world. One of the few since Weegee to actually be considered an *artist*.
His real problem is that he's addicted to his work, which bothers Molly because his work usually requires corpses, a fire, or some other tragedy.
Not that she's squeamish or anything, though. After all, she does run Scene of the Crime, his museum of mystery.
She just worries about a 68-year-old man running around with police and firemen like he did when he was 16.

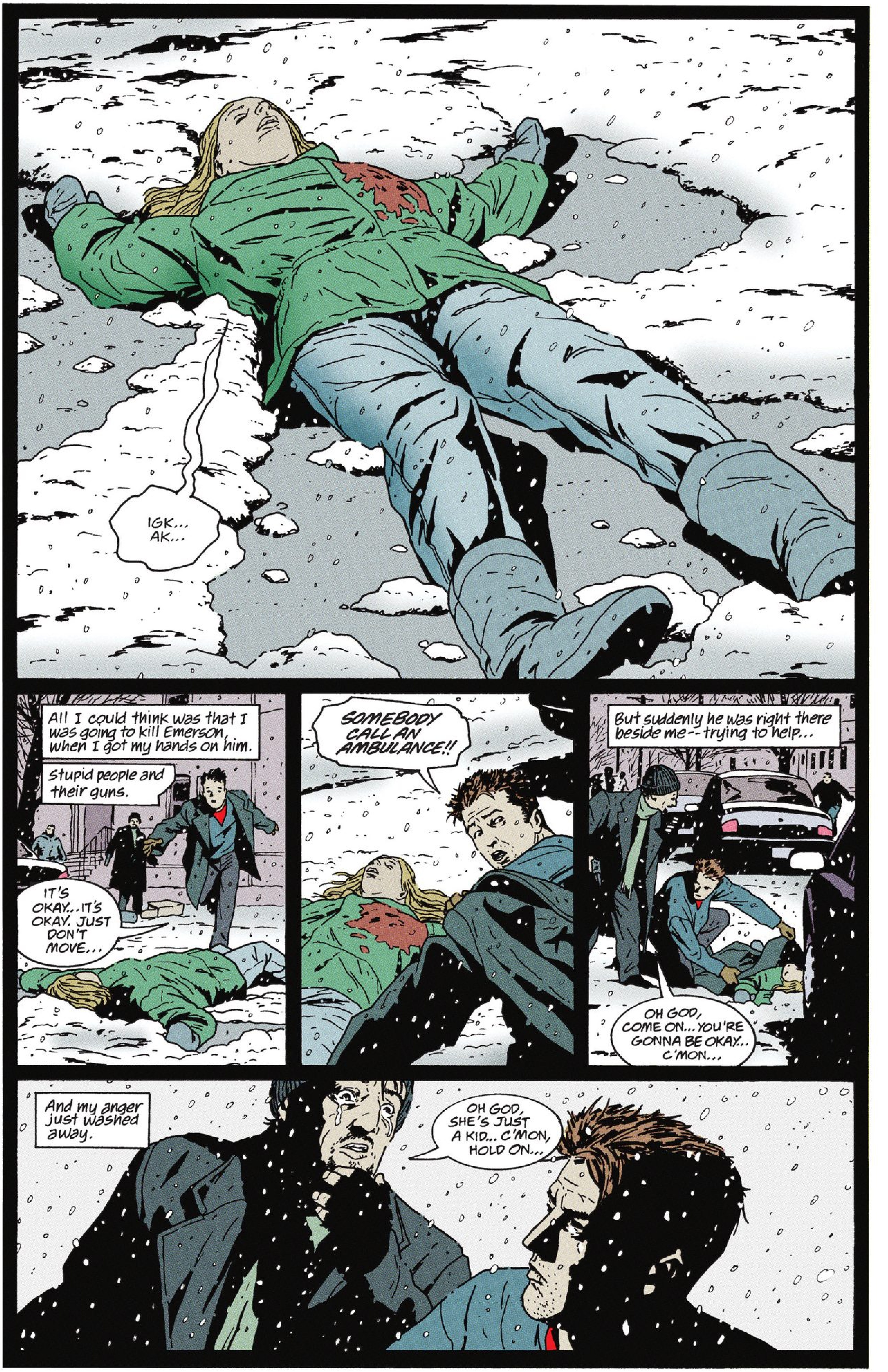

Cousin Beth was as nice as I remembered her from when I was ten years old. It was like old home week.
In fact, it was like old home week all over the airport.
For the next few days I alternated between waiting on stakeout down the street from Dirk Emerson's house in the daytime...
...and having "*family time*" in the evenings.
Don't get me wrong, I like family. I even like my own family--what's left of it. But a person would have to be crazy to like his family during Christmas.
Except for a few years ago with my ex-girlfriend, when we were trying to stay clean and really threw ourselves into the holiday spirit, I was the most cynical bastard in the world about the whole event.
All I could see was the syrupy-sweet phoniness of it all-- watching my relatives suddenly become these *bizarrely* happy strangers.
But as I was freezing my ass off in a rental car on Christmas Eve day, it occurred to me how ridiculous it was that I preferred *this* to a nice warm fire, and a family wrapping presents, getting ready for the big day.
If you have to be on stakeout in the winter, you don't want to be in Chicago-- especially if you're from California.
But I guess it could have been worse. He could have gone to Minneapolis.

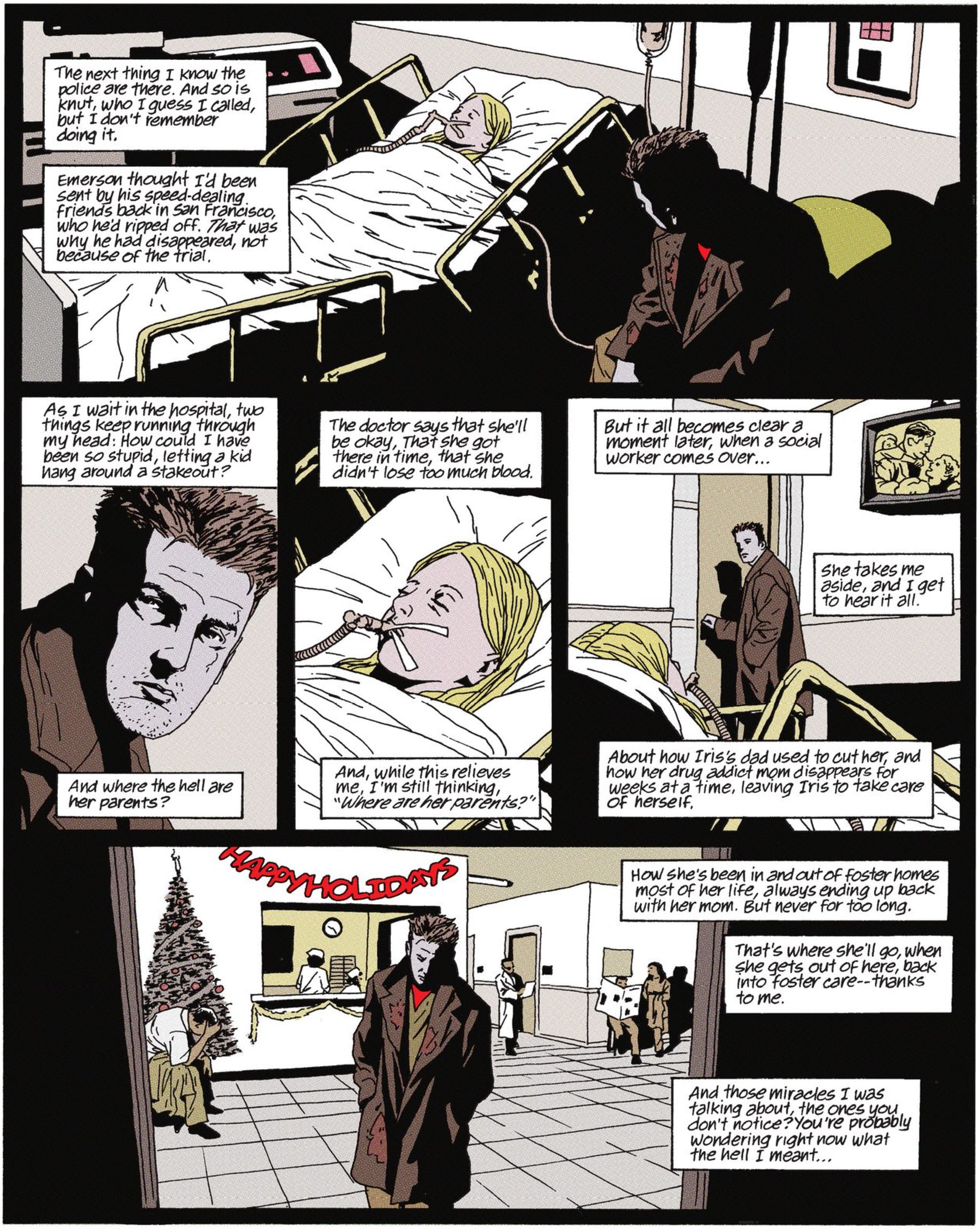

Stakeouts aren't very exciting, but they work most of the time. Almost everyone comes home eventually. The trick is finding out where "*home*" is. And then knowing what to *expect* once they get there.
I wasn't figuring that Emerson would be much trouble.
He'd gotten in too deep with a bad crowd of speed freaks and bikers, but my research showed that just a year earlier he'd been a family man, leading a pretty straight life.
Speed was like that sometimes. I'd seen plenty of lives go straight down the tubes on that stuff, faster than on heroin, even. And nothing sucks you in like heroin.
Emerson had been a witness to a deal that had gone wrong, ending in the death of one of his friends, a guy affectionately known as "*Pigfucker.*"
While the world was crying no tears over this loss, our client needed Emerson to vouch for his self-defense plea.
It was no big deal; one scumbag kills another, and the world goes on. But Emerson had gotten cold feet, and so now I was getting cold *everything* so I could bring him back.
HEY! WHAT'RE YOU DOING?
WHAT'S IN THAT BOTTLE?
JESUS! DON'T SNEAK UP ON PEOPLE LIKE THAT.
I DIDN'T *SNEAK* UP. I'VE BEEN WATCHIN' YOU FOR DAYS.
WHAT'RE YOU DOIN'? YOU A COP?
YOU BEEN WATCHING *ME*? JESUS, I DIDN'T EVEN SEE YOU...
YEAH, NO ONE EVER NOTICES KIDS.
I GUESS *NOT*. WELL, LOOK... I'M KINDA BUSY HERE, AND I DON'T WANT TO ATTRACT ATTENTION TO MYSELF, SO...
YEAH, YEAH, HIT THE *ROAD*. I HEAR YA!
SORRY...

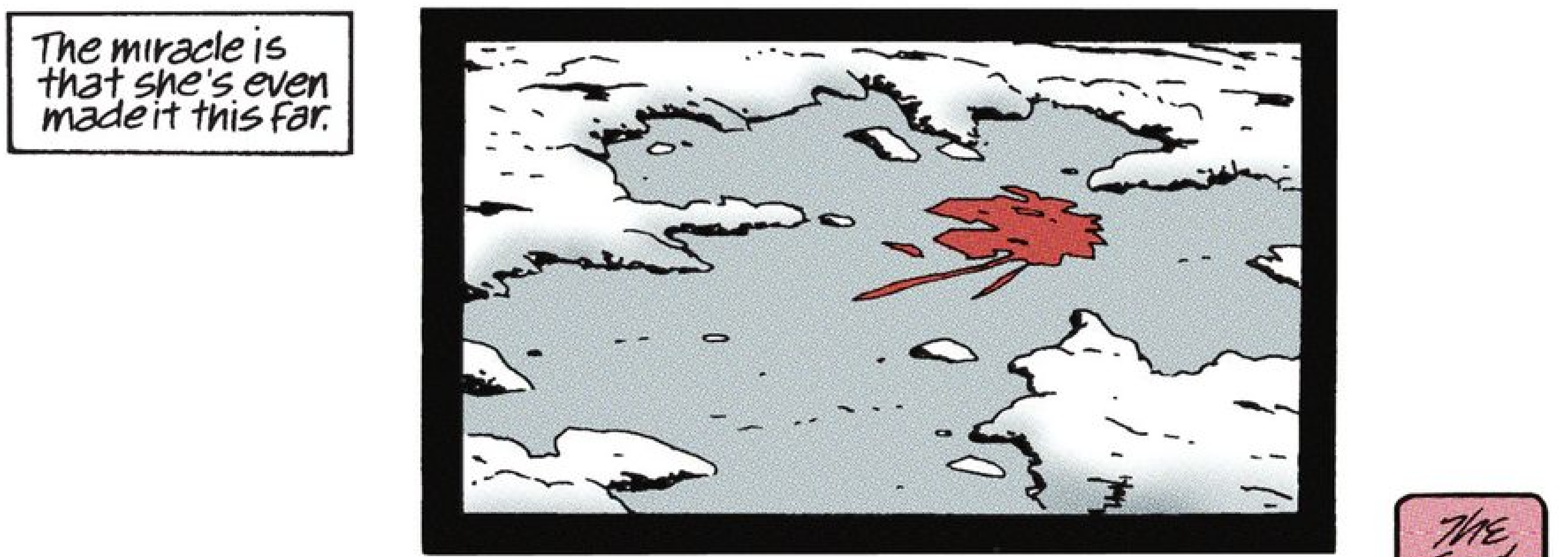

WHAT WAS IN THAT *BOTTLE?*
I THOUGHT YOU WERE *LEAVING?*
I FORGOT TO ASK YOU A FEW THINGS, THAT'S *ALL.* I'M FROM NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH.
IS THAT *RIGHT?*
YEAH, *SOMEONE'S* GOTTA KEEP THESE STREETS CLEANED UP. AND YOU COPS SEEM PRETTY *CLUELESS.*
HEY, I'M *NOT* A COP, OKAY?
THEN WHAT ARE YOU, *FBI?*
RIGHT, DO I *LOOK* LIKE *FBI?*
YOU COULD BE UNDERCOVER. LIKE JOHNNY DEPP.
OKAY, YOU GOT ME.
I'M UNDERCOVER, AND IF YOU DON'T LEAVE ME *ALONE,* YOU COULD GET ME IN REAL TROUBLE, SO SCOOT, OKAY?
BUT WHAT'S THAT *BOTTLE?*
OFF! GO!
ALL RIGHT... FINE...
What was I supposed to do, tell her that I'm on a stakeout by myself and I had to bring a big bottle along in case I need to pee?


For the next hour, every time I looked around, there she was--pretending to ignore me, and doing a pretty good job of it.
I wondered about having a whole surveillance team made up of children. No one would notice them, and I could probably pay them with "beanie babies" or something.
It wasn't a bad idea, except, who wanted to work with kids?
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT SOME OF THE USUAL COP FOOD, JOHNNY.
HA HA HA. BUT, THANKS.
AND MY NAME'S JACK, ACTUALLY. SHOULDN'T YOU BE AT HOME GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS? PRAYING OR SOMETHING?
AH, WHO CARES ABOUT THAT? HEY, COOL SCAR, HOW DID YOU GET IT?
OH, I WAS IN AN ACCIDENT A LONG TIME AGO... BACK WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.
WHAT ABOUT YOURS?
WHAT? OH, THIS?
SAME AS YOU, AN ACCIDENT. BACK WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.


HEY, DON'T BE OBVIOUS, BUT ISN'T THAT THE GUY FROM YOUR PICTURES?
WHAT? WHERE?
COMING THIS WAY. DON'T LOOK!
She was right. It was Emerson.
And just when I was hoping he wouldn't show so I could skip Christmas Day at Cousin Beth's.
OKAY, GOOD WORK, THAT'S THE GUY. BUT YOU'VE GOTTA SPLIT NOW. THIS COULD GET ROUGH.
AW, C'MON... I WANNA SEE...
NO. THIS IS SERIOUS.
I was exaggerating, because I wanted to get rid of her. But it obviously wasn't working.
But then I saw the fear in his eyes, and I knew it was all wrong-- that I had underestimated him.
MR. EMERSON?
I heard my car window explode with the first shot. And nothing with the second.
KBLAM
KBLAM
But somehow I knew...
NO! NO! GODDAMN IT! NO!


IGK... AK...
All I could think was that I was going to kill Emerson, when I got my hands on him.
Stupid people and their guns.
IT'S OKAY... IT'S OKAY. JUST DON'T MOVE...
SOMEBODY CALL AN AMBULANCE!!
But suddenly he was right there beside me -- trying to help...
OH GOD, COME ON... YOU'RE GONNA BE OKAY... C'MON...
And my anger just washed away.
OH GOD, SHE'S JUST A KID... C'MON, HOLD ON...


The next thing I know the police are there. And so is knut, who I guess I called, but I don't remember doing it.
Emerson thought I'd been sent by his speed-dealing friends back in San Francisco, who he'd ripped off. *That* was why he had disappeared, not because of the trial.
As I wait in the hospital, two things keep running through my head: How could I have been so stupid, letting a kid hang around a stakeout?
And where the hell are her parents?
The doctor says that she'll be okay, That she got there in time, that she didn't lose too much blood.
And, while this relieves me, I'm still thinking, *"Where are her parents?"*
But it all becomes clear a moment later, when a social worker comes over...
She takes me aside, and I get to hear it all.
About how Iris's dad used to cut her, and how her drug addict mom disappears for weeks at a time, leaving Iris to take care of herself.
HAPPY HOLIDAYS
How she's been in and out of foster homes most of her life, always ending up back with her mom. But never for too long.
That's where she'll go, when she gets out of here, back into foster care--thanks to me.
And those miracles I was talking about, the ones you don't notice? You're probably wondering right now what the hell I meant...


The miracle is that she's even made it this far.
The End

Extras

SCENE OF THE CRIME

The Untold Story (and Scene of the Crime)

by Ed Brubaker

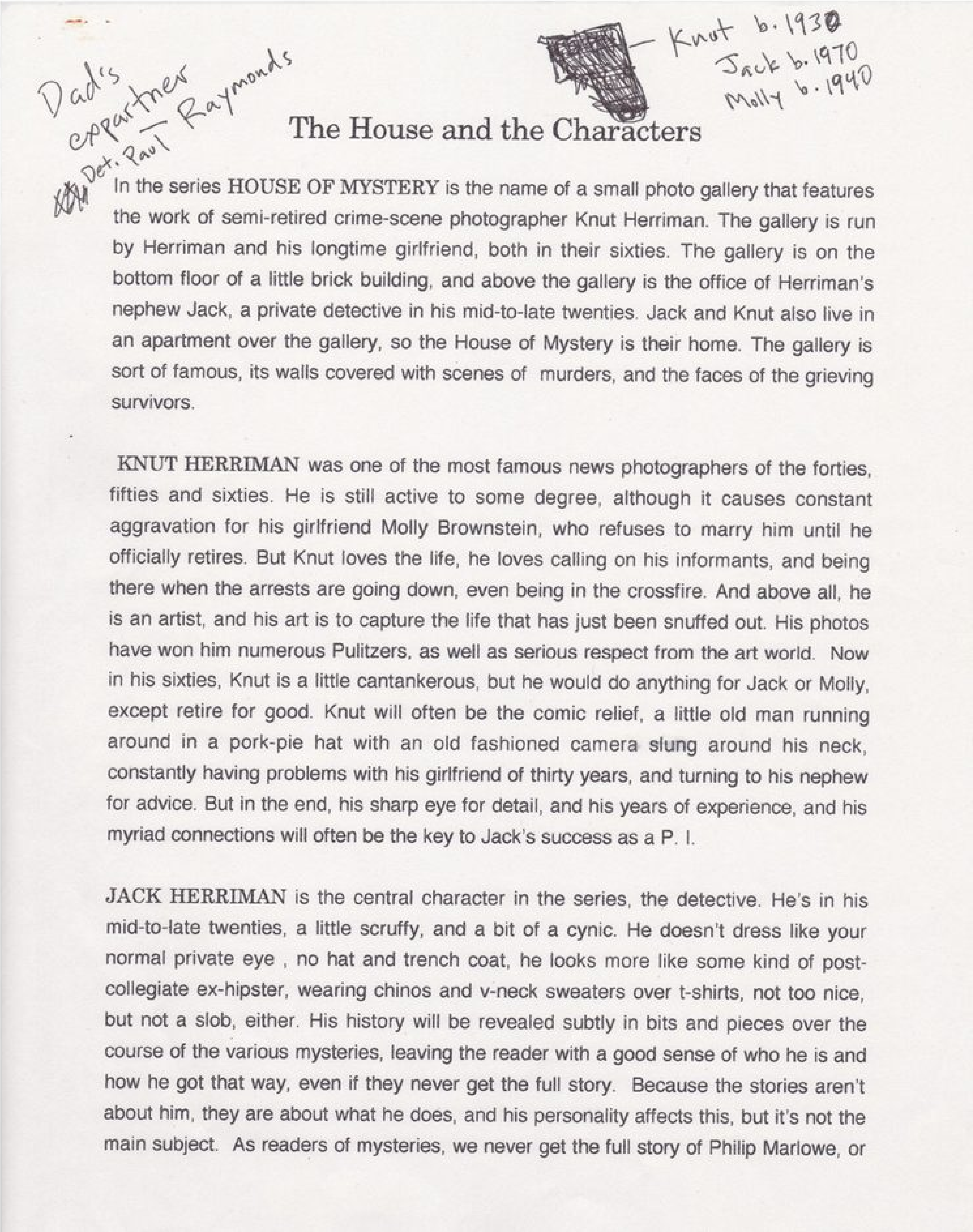
This is one of the three projects I credit with giving me a career. Because that's how it works, when it works… one project leads to another, working with an artist leads to being noticed by editors who follow that artist, and suddenly a few years have passed and your life is totally different.

The first two projects I credit are ***Lowlife*** (my first comics, that I also drew) and ***An Accidental Death***, which was drawn by Eric Shanower. My work on ***Lowlife*** had given Eric Shanower enough faith in me as a writer that he let me write the only contemporary crime story he's ever drawn, mining our shared history of living in Gitmo, back in the 1970s. At that point, I'd gone from reading Pulp and Beat fiction to binging on True Crime books, and I had a lot of fun writing something for someone else to draw. Especially since it was someone as good as Eric.

At that time Vertigo was after Eric to do more work for them, and he said he would, as long as his friend could write it. The editor, Lou Stathis, asked "Is this guy any good?" and luckily for us, ***An Accidental Death*** had just gotten nominated for several Eisner Awards. So Eric and I did a one-shot for Lou at Vertigo, and a short story for Axel Alonso when he was there… and then nothing. I pitched for a few books, in what we call bake-offs -- where several writers submit proposals for one project – but after not landing any, I figured that was it, and gave up on Vertigo as a career path.

But a few years later, after the sudden death of Lou Stathis, Shelly Roeberg (now known as Shelly Bond) began hounding me. She and Lou had been a couple, she was grieving, and Lou had liked me, so she was basically demanding I work with her. She wouldn't give up. So I looked at what Vertigo was doing, and tried to think of things like that, but nothing hit. After a few months of rejections, I told Shelly I didn't think the kinds of things I really wanted to write were things Vertigo would publish, and I'll never forget her response: "What is it you want to do then? Give me a proposal for this thing you think we won't publish."

Two days later I sent her a pitch, and by Friday that week, it'd been approved. And a week later we were searching for an artist. Anyone who's worked at Vertigo knows that's not the way it usually goes. I always jokingly say I pitched ***Scene*** to try to get Shelly to give up on me, but it's not true. I didn't think they'd go for a mystery book, but as I worked on the pitch, I wanted desperately for it to get picked up. I really wanted to write these stories. And I don't think Shelly would have given up anyway, which is something I really love about her.



Dad's
ex-partner
Det. Paul Raymonds

Knut b. 1930
Jack b. 1970
Molly b. 1940

The House and the Characters

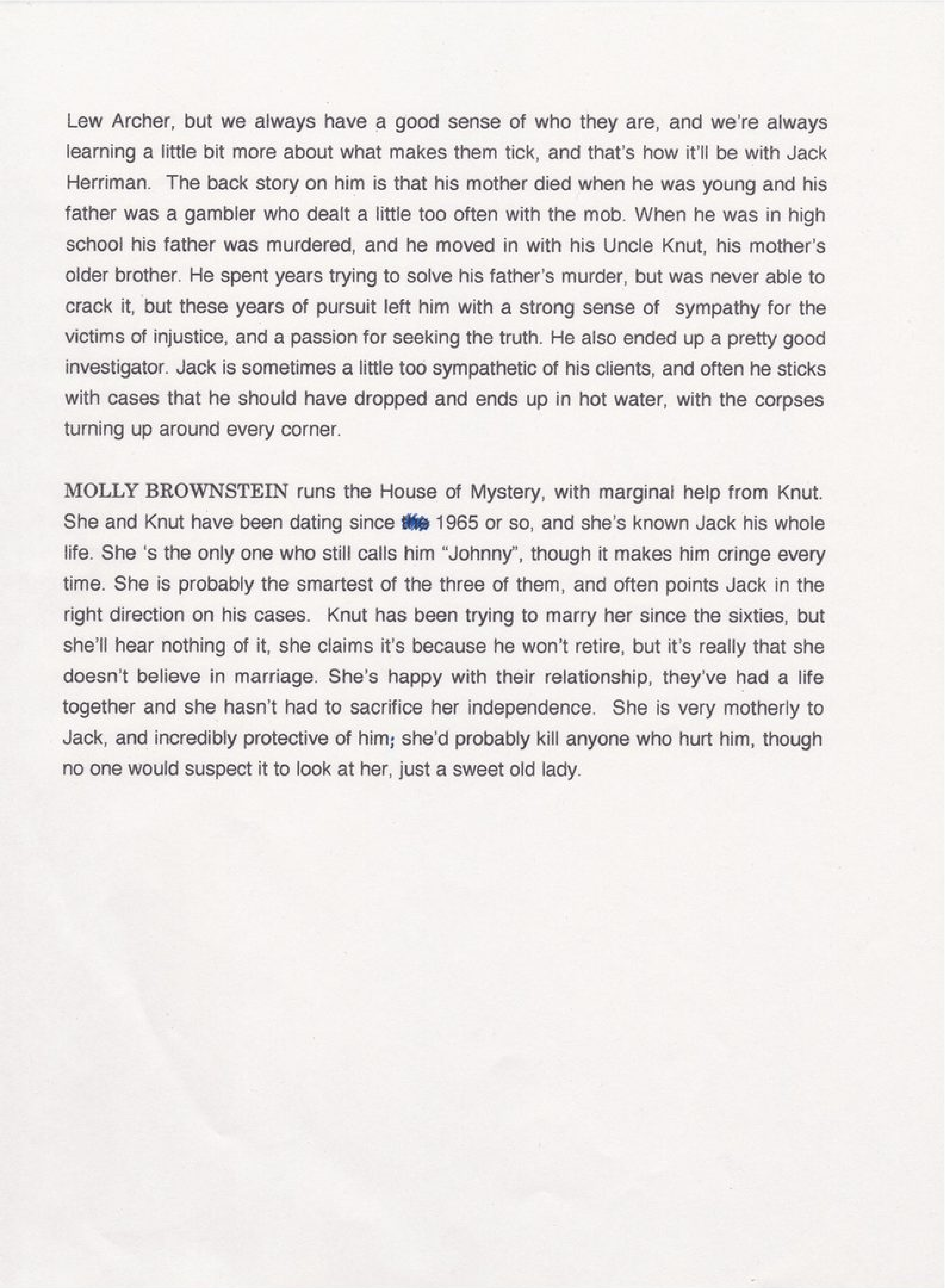
In the series HOUSE OF MYSTERY is the name of a small photo gallery that features the work of semi-retired crime-scene photographer Knut Herriman. The gallery is run by Herriman and his longtime girlfriend, both in their sixties. The gallery is on the bottom floor of a little brick building, and above the gallery is the office of Herriman's nephew Jack, a private detective in his mid-to-late twenties. Jack and Knut also live in an apartment over the gallery, so the House of Mystery is their home. The gallery is sort of famous, its walls covered with scenes of murders, and the faces of the grieving survivors.

KNUT HERRIMAN was one of the most famous news photographers of the forties, fifties and sixties. He is still active to some degree, although it causes constant aggravation for his girlfriend Molly Brownstein, who refuses to marry him until he officially retires. But Knut loves the life, he loves calling on his informants, and being there when the arrests are going down, even being in the crossfire. And above all, he is an artist, and his art is to capture the life that has just been snuffed out. His photos have won him numerous Pulitzers, as well as serious respect from the art world. Now in his sixties, Knut is a little cantankerous, but he would do anything for Jack or Molly, except retire for good. Knut will often be the comic relief, a little old man running around in a pork-pie hat with an old fashioned camera slung around his neck, constantly having problems with his girlfriend of thirty years, and turning to his nephew for advice. But in the end, his sharp eye for detail, and his years of experience, and his myriad connections will often be the key to Jack's success as a P. I.

JACK HERRIMAN is the central character in the series, the detective. He's in his mid-to-late twenties, a little scruffy, and a bit of a cynic. He doesn't dress like your normal private eye , no hat and trench coat, he looks more like some kind of post-collegiate ex-hipster, wearing chinos and v-neck sweaters over t-shirts, not too nice, but not a slob, either. His history will be revealed subtly in bits and pieces over the course of the various mysteries, leaving the reader with a good sense of who he is and how he got that way, even if they never get the full story. Because the stories aren't about him, they are about what he does, and his personality affects this, but it's not the main subject. As readers of mysteries, we never get the full story of Philip Marlowe, or

Some of my original proposal was lost over the years (and some of it I don't want to show) but the first thing you'll notice is that it wasn't originally called ***Scene of the Crime***. It still had the same main characters, but it was going to be called ***House of Mystery***. At that time, Vertigo was using the old DC title ***House of Secrets*** for a creator-owned horror series, and I thought it'd be a good idea to use DC's other ***House*** title, and tell actual mysteries in it this time. I can't remember why this didn't fly, but I was asked to come up with a new name instead, so I did.

At this point, the longest thing I'd written was the 64 page one-shot I'd done for Lou, so Shelly basically had to teach me how to do everything. I learned how to do proposals by reading the ones she showed me from other writers, and she even helped me learn how to outline, by telling me how Steve Seagle did it.



Lew Archer, but we always have a good sense of who they are, and we're always learning a little bit more about what makes them tick, and that's how it'll be with Jack Herriman. The back story on him is that his mother died when he was young and his father was a gambler who dealt a little too often with the mob. When he was in high school his father was murdered, and he moved in with his Uncle Knut, his mother's older brother. He spent years trying to solve his father's murder, but was never able to crack it, but these years of pursuit left him with a strong sense of sympathy for the victims of injustice, and a passion for seeking the truth. He also ended up a pretty good investigator. Jack is sometimes a little too sympathetic of his clients, and often he sticks with cases that he should have dropped and ends up in hot water, with the corpses turning up around every corner.

MOLLY BROWNSTEIN runs the House of Mystery, with marginal help from Knut. She and Knut have been dating since ~~the~~ 1965 or so, and she's known Jack his whole life. She 's the only one who still calls him "Johnny", though it makes him cringe every time. She is probably the smartest of the three of them, and often points Jack in the right direction on his cases. Knut has been trying to marry her since the sixties, but she'll hear nothing of it, she claims it's because he won't retire, but it's really that she doesn't believe in marriage. She's happy with their relationship, they've had a life together and she hasn't had to sacrifice her independence. She is very motherly to Jack, and incredibly protective of him; she'd probably kill anyone who hurt him, though no one would suspect it to look at her, just a sweet old lady.

The missing pages from this proposal are the first two, which would have been the "high concept" pitch part, explaining the premise of the series and doing my best to sell it. Then there are the pages about the main location and the main characters. Pretty much everything here stayed, except Jack's dad. Originally, as you can see, he wasn't going to be a cop.

***

A few years before pitching this, I'd fallen in love with the mystery genre. I'd always watched mystery TV shows and movies, and I read crime novels all the time, but detective novels had never been my thing. Then my friend Steve Weissman changed all that when he gave me a few of Ross Macdonald's ***Lew Archer*** books. And I became obsessed. I read the entire series, some of them more than once, to study Macdonald's structure. I often feel like those Lew Archer books were my writing school, and the mysteries I pitched for ***Scene*** owed a huge debt to the Archer books. Hell, almost everyone's first mystery novels do.

The thing I really loved about what Macdonald did (and it's something almost all mystery writers do, he just did it more elegantly than any since Chandler and Hammett) was the untold part of the mystery story. Because every mystery novel has an entire unseen storyline, the one that goes on behind the scenes. While the detective is chasing one lead, the killer is off on some other path, leaving bodies for him to stumble over chapters later. That was like a puzzle the writer in me wanted to solve. I started making timelines to see where these plots overlapped, and started understanding why so many literary writers were also obsessed with mysteries.

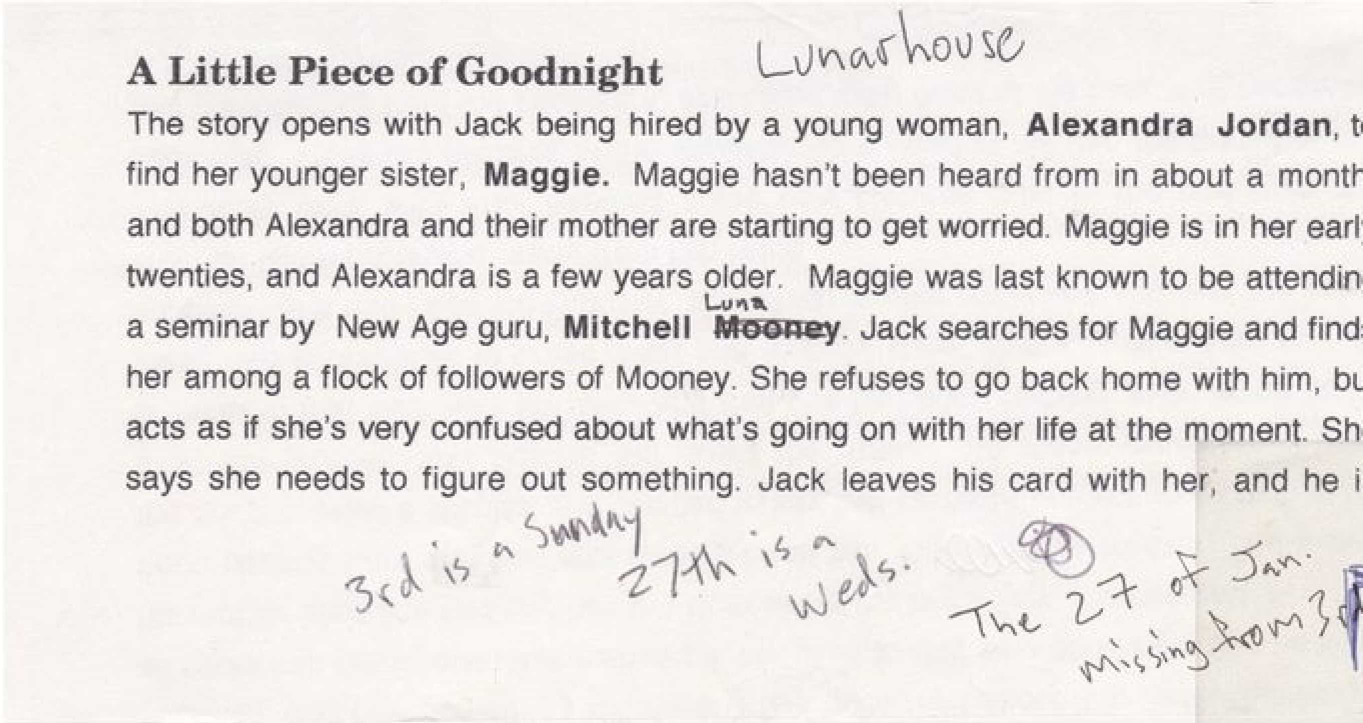
As a writer, you get to a point where you realize the things your characters don't say are just as important as the things they do. And in a good mystery, the most important plot thread of the entire story is the one the reader never sees. But the writer has to know every moment of it, every reason why this car crashed, and why that girl killed that guy, and where the evidence was moved from and to. Structurally, there is nothing quite as much fun to figure out.

***

When the proposal went in, ***Scene*** was meant to be a monthly series, with three mysteries a year. I included outlines for the first two, and A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT was actually the second of them. I think the cult angle of this one appealed more as the launch mystery, was the reasoning for using it first. Soon I was told we weren't going to be a monthly, we were going to be a series of mini-series, instead, and the plan was to go right into the next one, with just a few months between them… but that never happened.

I'm not sure if Vertigo lost their mojo for ***Scene***, or if we got caught in the gears of the industry, but next thing I knew, Michael was off drawing a Hawkman series that took him nearly two years, and so any talk of a follow-up just kind of died.

You can see most of the original outline for the story you just read here, along with some of my handwritten notes. Those first ones are part of the work done on the unseen plot, working the timeline.



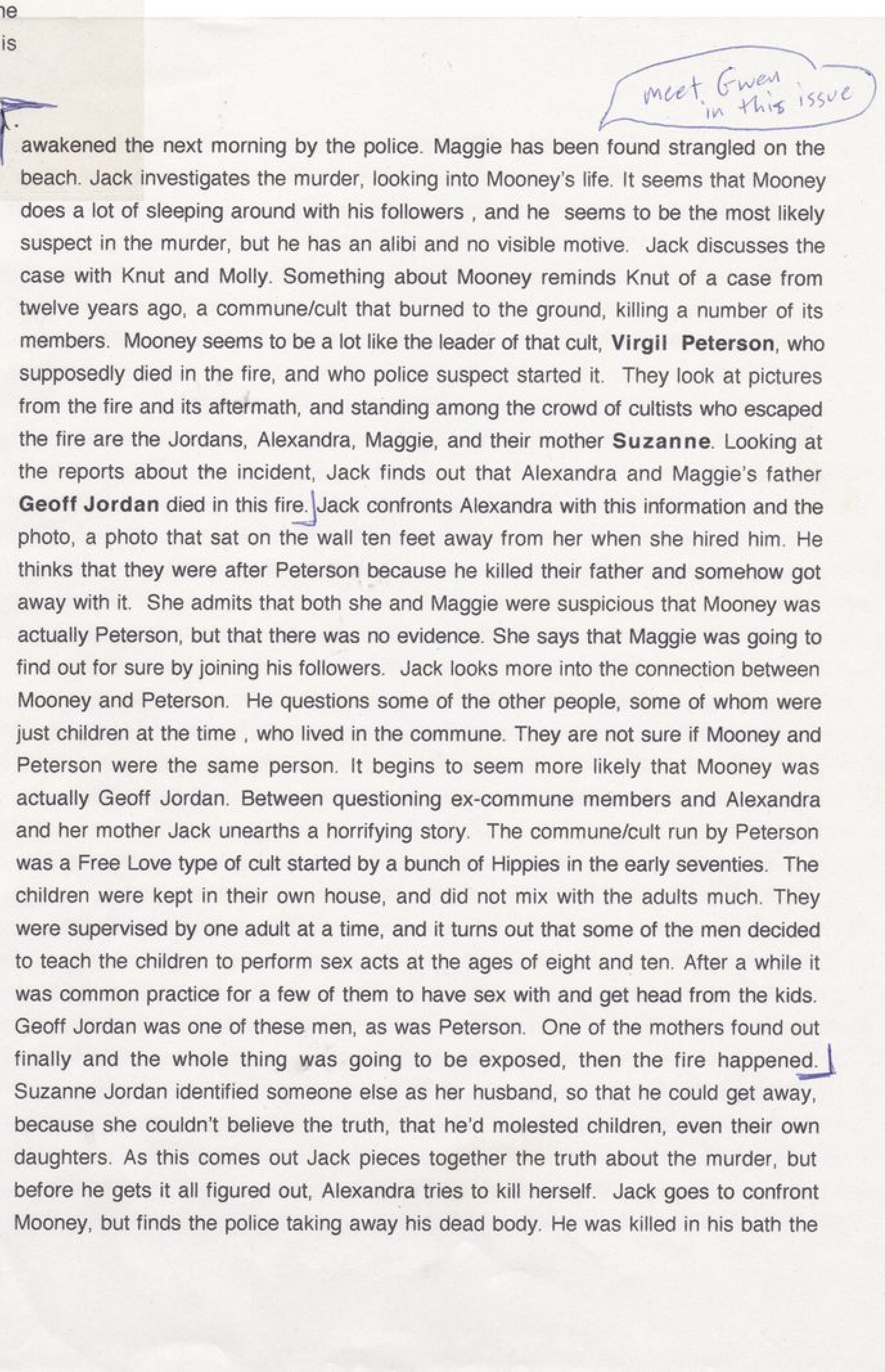
A Little Piece of Goodnight Lunarhouse

The story opens with Jack being hired by a young woman, **Alexandra Jordan**, to find her younger sister, **Maggie.** Maggie hasn't been heard from in about a month, and both Alexandra and their mother are starting to get worried. Maggie is in her early twenties, and Alexandra is a few years older. Maggie was last known to be attending a seminar by New Age guru, **Mitchell** Luna **~~Mooney~~**. Jack searches for Maggie and finds her among a flock of followers of Mooney. She refuses to go back home with him, but acts as if she's very confused about what's going on with her life at the moment. She says she needs to figure out something. Jack leaves his card with her, and he is

3rd is a Sunday

27th is a weds.

The 27 of Jan. missing from 3rd.

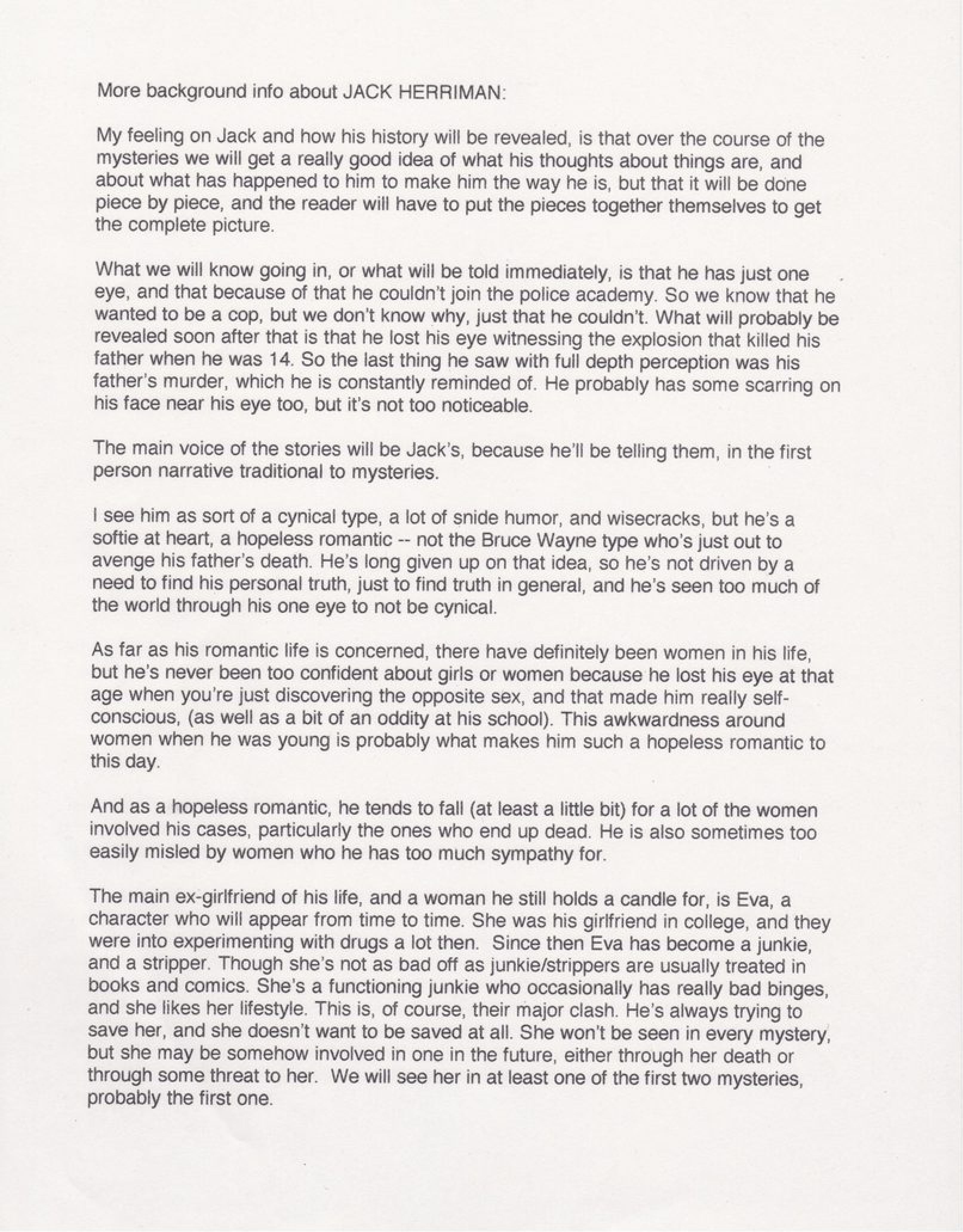


meet Gwen in this issue

awakened the next morning by the police. Maggie has been found strangled on the beach. Jack investigates the murder, looking into Mooney's life. It seems that Mooney does a lot of sleeping around with his followers , and he seems to be the most likely suspect in the murder, but he has an alibi and no visible motive. Jack discusses the case with Knut and Molly. Something about Mooney reminds Knut of a case from twelve years ago, a commune/cult that burned to the ground, killing a number of its members. Mooney seems to be a lot like the leader of that cult, **Virgil Peterson**, who supposedly died in the fire, and who police suspect started it. They look at pictures from the fire and its aftermath, and standing among the crowd of cultists who escaped the fire are the Jordans, Alexandra, Maggie, and their mother **Suzanne**. Looking at the reports about the incident, Jack finds out that Alexandra and Maggie's father **Geoff Jordan** died in this fire. Jack confronts Alexandra with this information and the photo, a photo that sat on the wall ten feet away from her when she hired him. He thinks that they were after Peterson because he killed their father and somehow got away with it. She admits that both she and Maggie were suspicious that Mooney was actually Peterson, but that there was no evidence. She says that Maggie was going to find out for sure by joining his followers. Jack looks more into the connection between Mooney and Peterson. He questions some of the other people, some of whom were just children at the time , who lived in the commune. They are not sure if Mooney and Peterson were the same person. It begins to seem more likely that Mooney was actually Geoff Jordan. Between questioning ex-commune members and Alexandra and her mother Jack unearths a horrifying story. The commune/cult run by Peterson was a Free Love type of cult started by a bunch of Hippies in the early seventies. The children were kept in their own house, and did not mix with the adults much. They were supervised by one adult at a time, and it turns out that some of the men decided to teach the children to perform sex acts at the ages of eight and ten. After a while it was common practice for a few of them to have sex with and get head from the kids. Geoff Jordan was one of these men, as was Peterson. One of the mothers found out finally and the whole thing was going to be exposed, then the fire happened. Suzanne Jordan identified someone else as her husband, so that he could get away, because she couldn't believe the truth, that he'd molested children, even their own daughters. As this comes out Jack pieces together the truth about the murder, but before he gets it all figured out, Alexandra tries to kill herself. Jack goes to confront Mooney, but finds the police taking away his dead body. He was killed in his bath the

Rereading this again all these years later, I see I stuck to the basic plot, but changed a lot of the details, and the characters of Paul Raymonds and Steve Ellington aren't in it at all. Steve the P.I. was a bit of a tribute to Hammett's ***Continental Op***, as well as a stand-in for Steve Weissman, who lived in Chinatown and was known to wear a fedora and overcoat sometimes.

Around the time we got Michael Lark to sign onto the series, I wrote up an extra page about Jack, along with a brief sketch of my idea for the third mystery. Michael and I hit it off right away, and he was sending over character sketches within days.



More background info about JACK HERRIMAN:

My feeling on Jack and how his history will be revealed, is that over the course of the mysteries we will get a really good idea of what his thoughts about things are, and about what has happened to him to make him the way he is, but that it will be done piece by piece, and the reader will have to put the pieces together themselves to get the complete picture.

What we will know going in, or what will be told immediately, is that he has just one eye, and that because of that he couldn't join the police academy. So we know that he wanted to be a cop, but we don't know why, just that he couldn't. What will probably be revealed soon after that is that he lost his eye witnessing the explosion that killed his father when he was 14. So the last thing he saw with full depth perception was his father's murder, which he is constantly reminded of. He probably has some scarring on his face near his eye too, but it's not too noticeable.

The main voice of the stories will be Jack's, because he'll be telling them, in the first person narrative traditional to mysteries.

I see him as sort of a cynical type, a lot of snide humor, and wisecracks, but he's a softie at heart, a hopeless romantic -- not the Bruce Wayne type who's just out to avenge his father's death. He's long given up on that idea, so he's not driven by a need to find his personal truth, just to find truth in general, and he's seen too much of the world through his one eye to not be cynical.

As far as his romantic life is concerned, there have definitely been women in his life, but he's never been too confident about girls or women because he lost his eye at that age when you're just discovering the opposite sex, and that made him really self-conscious, (as well as a bit of an oddity at his school). This awkwardness around women when he was young is probably what makes him such a hopeless romantic to this day.

And as a hopeless romantic, he tends to fall (at least a little bit) for a lot of the women involved his cases, particularly the ones who end up dead. He is also sometimes too easily misled by women who he has too much sympathy for.

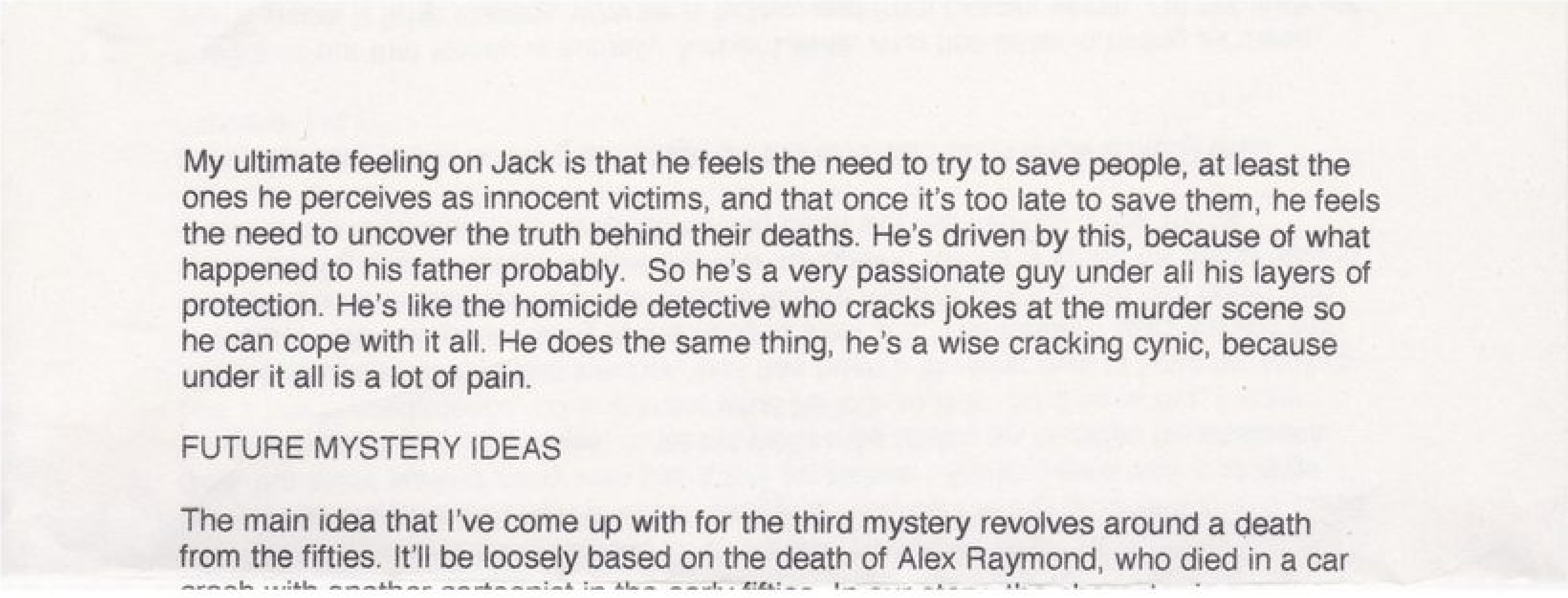
The main ex-girlfriend of his life, and a woman he still holds a candle for, is Eva, a character who will appear from time to time. She was his girlfriend in college, and they were into experimenting with drugs a lot then. Since then Eva has become a junkie, and a stripper. Though she's not as bad off as junkie/strippers are usually treated in books and comics. She's a functioning junkie who occasionally has really bad binges, and she likes her lifestyle. This is, of course, their major clash. He's always trying to save her, and she doesn't want to be saved at all. She won't be seen in every mystery, but she may be somehow involved in one in the future, either through her death or through some threat to her. We will see her in at least one of the first two mysteries, probably the first one.

As I said, I'd never written anything this long before, so I was honestly shitting myself. I didn't know if I could pull it off at all. But I had an editor and an artist and deadlines, so I had to try. Before this, most of my scripts had been written for myself to draw, so my scripts for other people just looked like typed versions of the way I wrote for myself, basically.

And man, do I cringe looking at this book now. Not because I'm not proud of it, but because the word balloons are so packed. Poor John Constanza. I was trying to fit so much in, I didn't think about space on the page. Lucky for me, Michael Lark always does balloon placement and rough lettering, so he knows how much room he'll have for the drawing, but yeah, I still cringe. Nowadays, I'd break the large balloons up into a few smaller ones, or rewrite them until I could say the same thing with less.

***

After the short story we did to introduce the series, and the first issue of the mini, Michael was feeling unhappy with his ink line. I thought it looked great, but he wanted something more European and free. So Shelly asked Sean Phillips if he'd ink Michael for the last three issues. Michael was so happy then. Sean's rough line was exactly how he'd pictured this series looking.



My ultimate feeling on Jack is that he feels the need to try to save people, at least the ones he perceives as innocent victims, and that once it's too late to save them, he feels the need to uncover the truth behind their deaths. He's driven by this, because of what happened to his father probably. So he's a very passionate guy under all his layers of protection. He's like the homicide detective who cracks jokes at the murder scene so he can cope with it all. He does the same thing, he's a wise cracking cynic, because under it all is a lot of pain.

FUTURE MYSTERY IDEAS

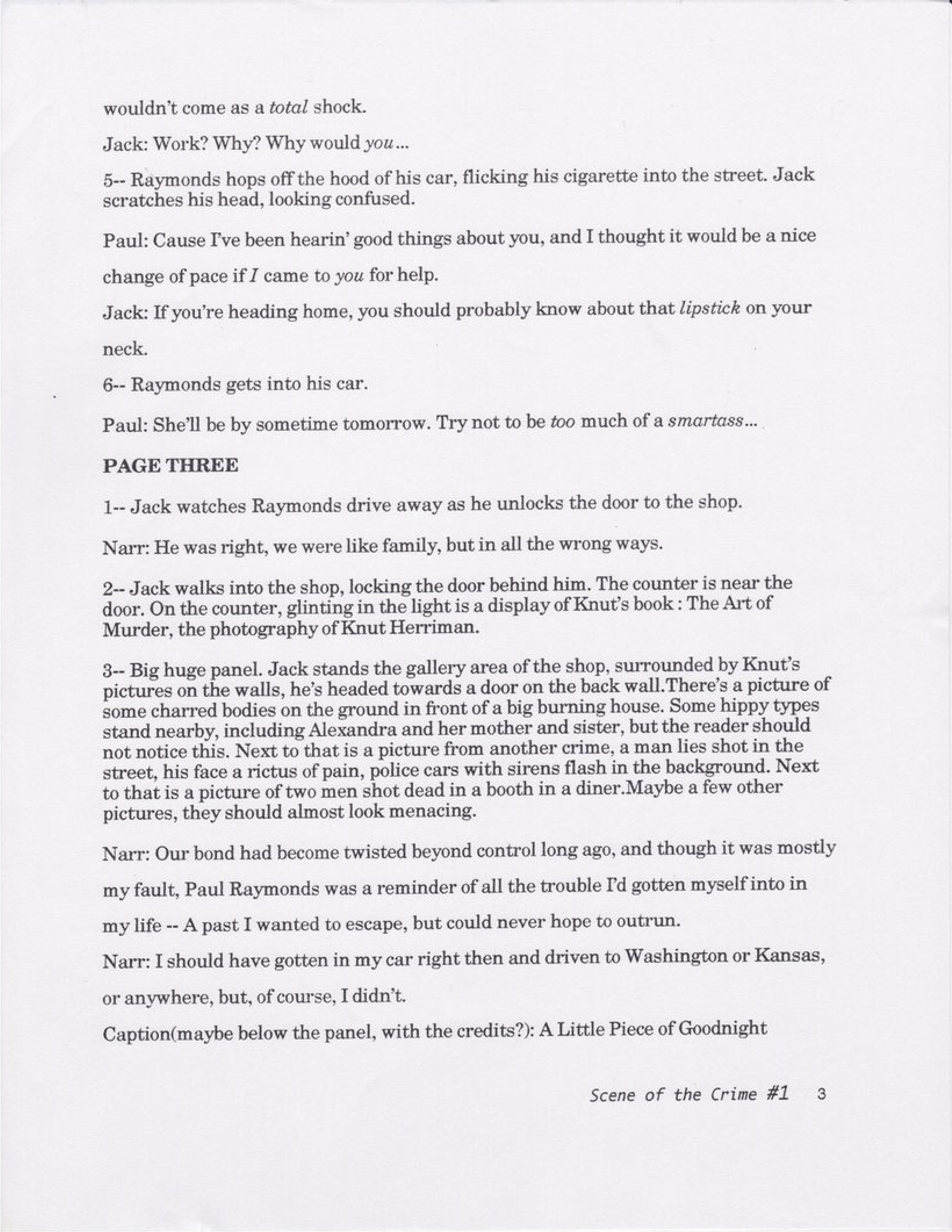
The main idea that I've come up with for the third mystery revolves around a death from the fifties. It'll be loosely based on the death of Alex Raymond, who died in a car

And not long after this, Sean and I were starting our first collaboration, primarily because of this book. Because, like I said, one thing leads to another. In early 1999, I was flown out to SCAD – the Savannah College of Art and Design - to be part of a comics event. Among the many comics dignitaries there that week was Mike Carlin, who at the time was the VP of publishing at DC, and who happened to be a big fan of Michael Lark's. So he'd been reading ***Scene*** as the issues came into the office, and he offered me a chance to do some work at DC proper. I politely turned him down, saying I didn't think I could write any of that "superhero" stuff.

"Nonsense," he said. "If you can write a mystery, you can write ***Batman***."

And of course he was right, and that led to ***Gotham Noir***, one of the last of DC's Elseworld books (and the first time Sean and I ever worked with current ***Fatale*** colorist Dave Stewart).

Gotham Noir led to Carlin recommending me to Bob Schreck, who had just taken over the Bat-office, and was already talking to me, since he'd worked on ***Accidental Death*** at Dark Horse. Within a few months I was writing the actual ***Batman*** monthly comic...
Not long after that, Sean and I were launching ***Sleeper*** at Wildstorm, and Greg Rucka and I were creating ***Gotham Central*** with Michael Lark, and really bringing our own voices to ***Batman***'s world.



wouldn't come as a *total* shock.

Jack: Work? Why? Why would *you*...

5-- Raymonds hops off the hood of his car, flicking his cigarette into the street. Jack scratches his head, looking confused.

Paul: Cause I've been hearin' good things about you, and I thought it would be a nice change of pace if *I* came to *you* for help.

Jack: If you're heading home, you should probably know about that *lipstick* on your neck.

6-- Raymonds gets into his car.

Paul: She'll be by sometime tomorrow. Try not to be *too* much of a *smartass*...

PAGE THREE

1-- Jack watches Raymonds drive away as he unlocks the door to the shop.

Narr: He was right, we were like family, but in all the wrong ways.

2-- Jack walks into the shop, locking the door behind him. The counter is near the door. On the counter, glinting in the light is a display of Knut's book : The Art of Murder, the photography of Knut Herriman.

3-- Big huge panel. Jack stands the gallery area of the shop, surrounded by Knut's pictures on the walls, he's headed towards a door on the back wall.There's a picture of some charred bodies on the ground in front of a big burning house. Some hippy types stand nearby, including Alexandra and her mother and sister, but the reader should not notice this. Next to that is a picture from another crime, a man lies shot in the street, his face a rictus of pain, police cars with sirens flash in the background. Next to that is a picture of two men shot dead in a booth in a diner.Maybe a few other pictures, they should almost look menacing.

Narr: Our bond had become twisted beyond control long ago, and though it was mostly my fault, Paul Raymonds was a reminder of all the trouble I'd gotten myself into in my life -- A past I wanted to escape, but could never hope to outrun.

Narr: I should have gotten in my car right then and driven to Washington or Kansas, or anywhere, but, of course, I didn't.

Caption(maybe below the panel, with the credits?): A Little Piece of Goodnight

Scene of the Crime #1 3

Looking back now, it doesn't seem that long ago, but times were changing so fast then. I started writing ***Scene of the Crime*** in early 1998, faxing in the first scripts, and by the time I was writing issue 4, I was emailing them in. Although with dial-up, that wasn't much quicker than faxing, really. Around the time our first issue came out, I started dating the woman who would become my wife. And in fact, I proposed to her at a cheap hotel in Portugal, while Michael and his wife were in the next room over, because we were all there for a comics festival.

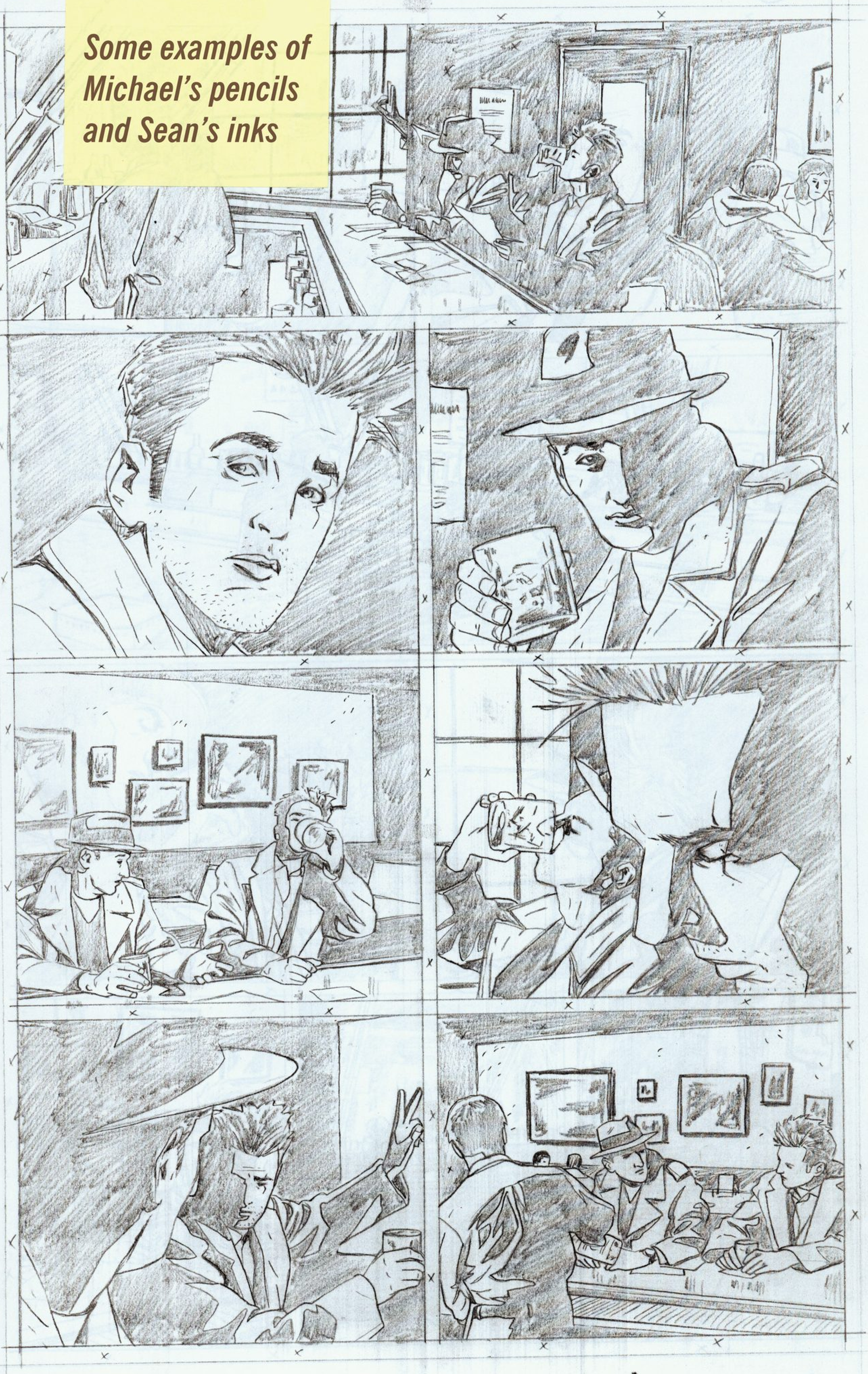
So this book really was a milestone, in more ways than one, and everything since then has rippled out from it. It means a lot to me to finally have it back in print in this gorgeous edition.

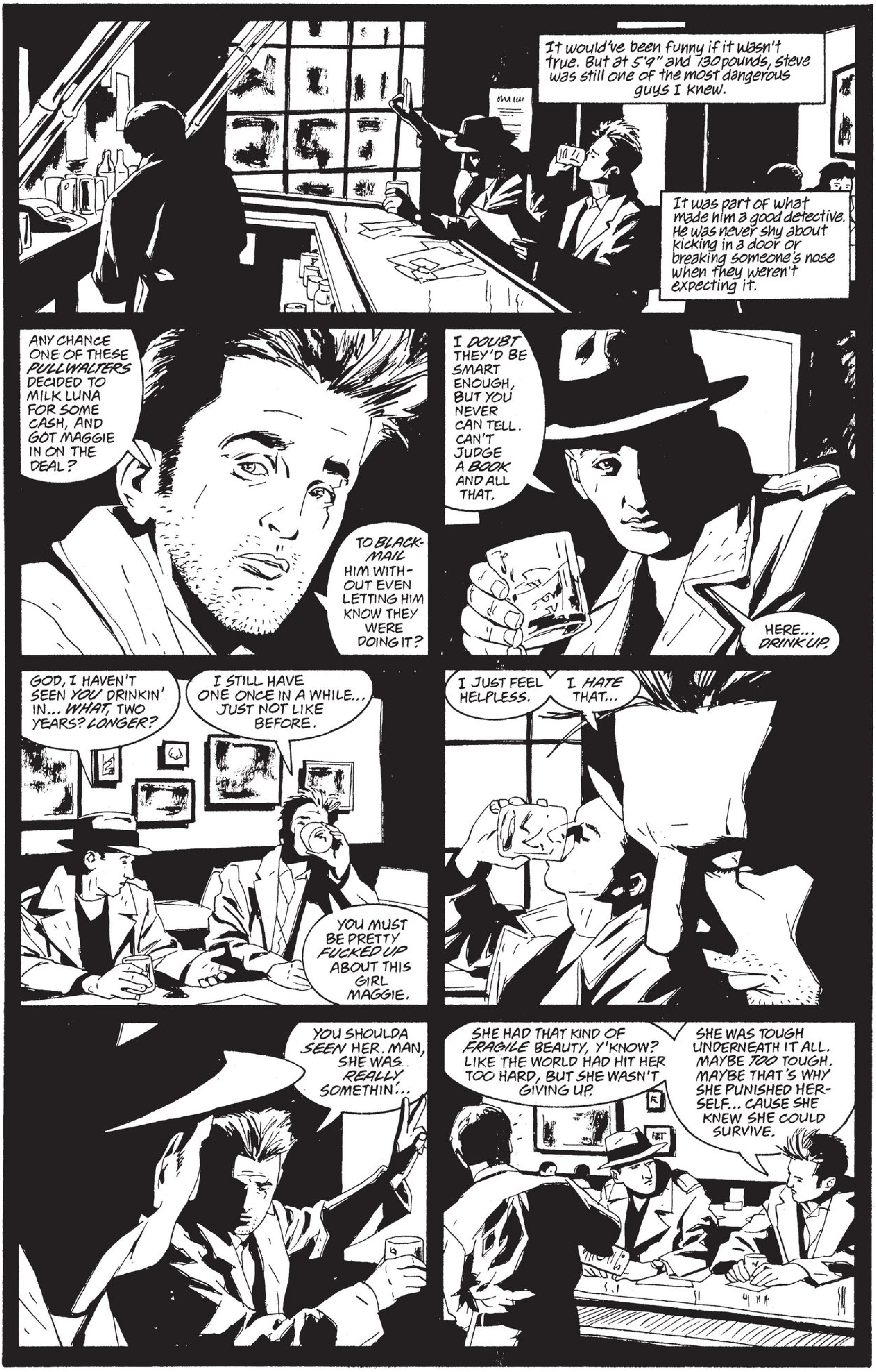
Thanks to Sean for designing this book, thanks to Lou Stathis and Shelly Bond for giving me my first big breaks and showing me the ropes, and thanks to Michael Lark, for being so good at all this. Michael and I have done hundreds and hundreds of pages together since this book, and I hope we do a few hundred more, at least.

SCEN

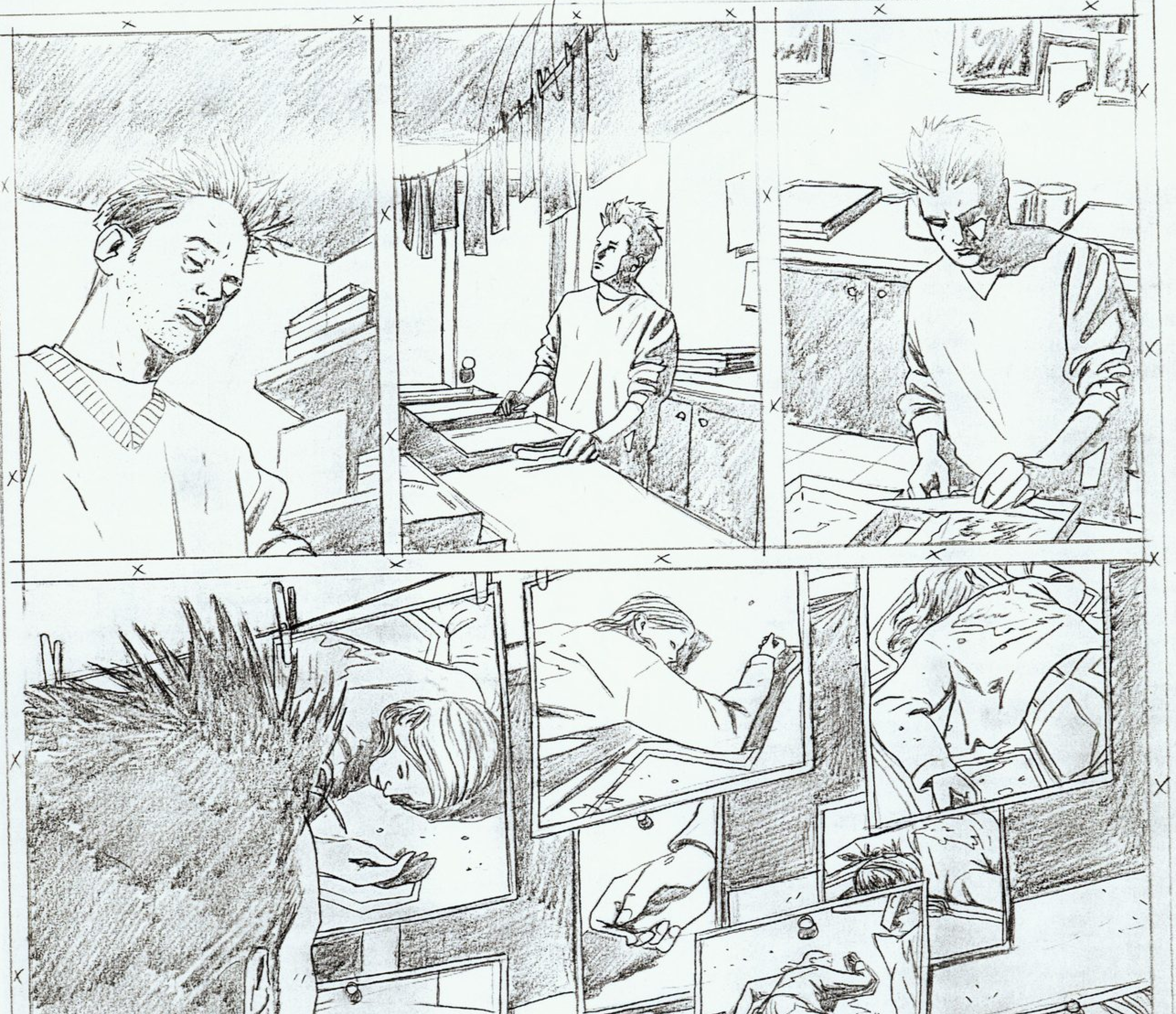
(17)

Some examples of Michael's pencils and Sean's inks




It would've been funny if it wasn't true. But at 5'9" and 130 pounds, Steve was still one of the most dangerous guys I knew.
It was part of what made him a good detective. He was never shy about kicking in a door or breaking someone's nose when they weren't expecting it.
ANY CHANCE ONE OF THESE *PULLWALTERS* DECIDED TO MILK LUNA FOR SOME CASH, AND GOT MAGGIE IN ON THE DEAL?
TO *BLACKMAIL* HIM WITHOUT EVEN LETTING HIM KNOW THEY WERE DOING IT?
I *DOUBT* THEY'D BE SMART ENOUGH, BUT YOU NEVER CAN TELL. CAN'T JUDGE A *BOOK* AND ALL THAT.
HERE... *DRINK UP.*
GOD, I HAVEN'T SEEN *YOU* DRINKIN' IN... *WHAT*, TWO YEARS? *LONGER?*
I STILL HAVE ONE ONCE IN A WHILE... JUST NOT LIKE BEFORE.
YOU MUST BE PRETTY *FUCKED UP* ABOUT THIS GIRL MAGGIE.
I JUST FEEL HELPLESS.
I *HATE* THAT...
YOU SHOULDA *SEEN* HER. MAN, SHE WAS. *REALLY* SOMETHIN'...
SHE HAD THAT KIND OF *FRAGILE* BEAUTY, Y'KNOW? LIKE THE WORLD HAD HIT HER TOO HARD, BUT SHE WASN'T GIVING UP.
SHE WAS TOUGH UNDERNEATH IT ALL. MAYBE *TOO* TOUGH. MAYBE THAT'S WHY SHE PUNISHED HERSELF... CAUSE SHE KNEW SHE COULD SURVIVE.

LEAVE HIGHLIGHT AROUND EDGES OF PHOTOS



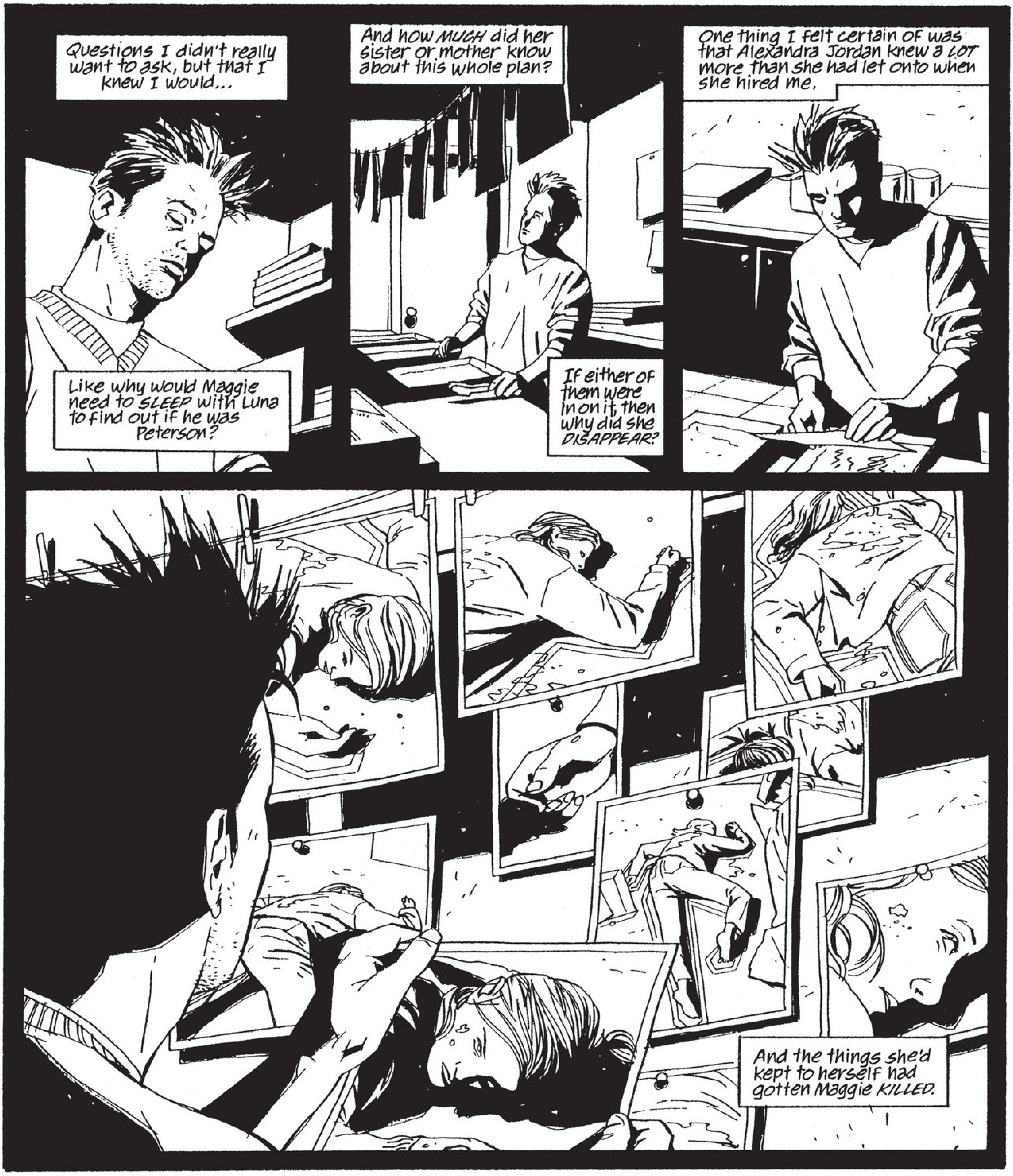
A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT

part three of four

ED BRUBAKER writer **MICHAEL LARK** pencils **SEAN PHILLIPS** inks

JOHN COSTANZA letters JAMES SINCLAIR colors JENNIFER LEE asst. editor SHELLY ROEBERG editor
SCENE OF THE CRIME created by BRUBAKER and LARK

INDICIA


Questions I didn't really want to ask, but that I knew I would...
Like why would Maggie need to *SLEEP* with Luna to find out if he was Peterson?
And how *MUCH* did her sister or mother know about this whole plan?
If either of them were in on it, then why did she *DISAPPEAR?*
One thing I felt certain of was that Alexandra Jordan knew a *LOT* more than she had let onto when she hired me.
And the things she'd kept to herself had gotten Maggie *KILLED.*

A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT

part three of four

ED BRUBAKER writer MICHAEL LARK pencils SEAN PHILLIPS inks

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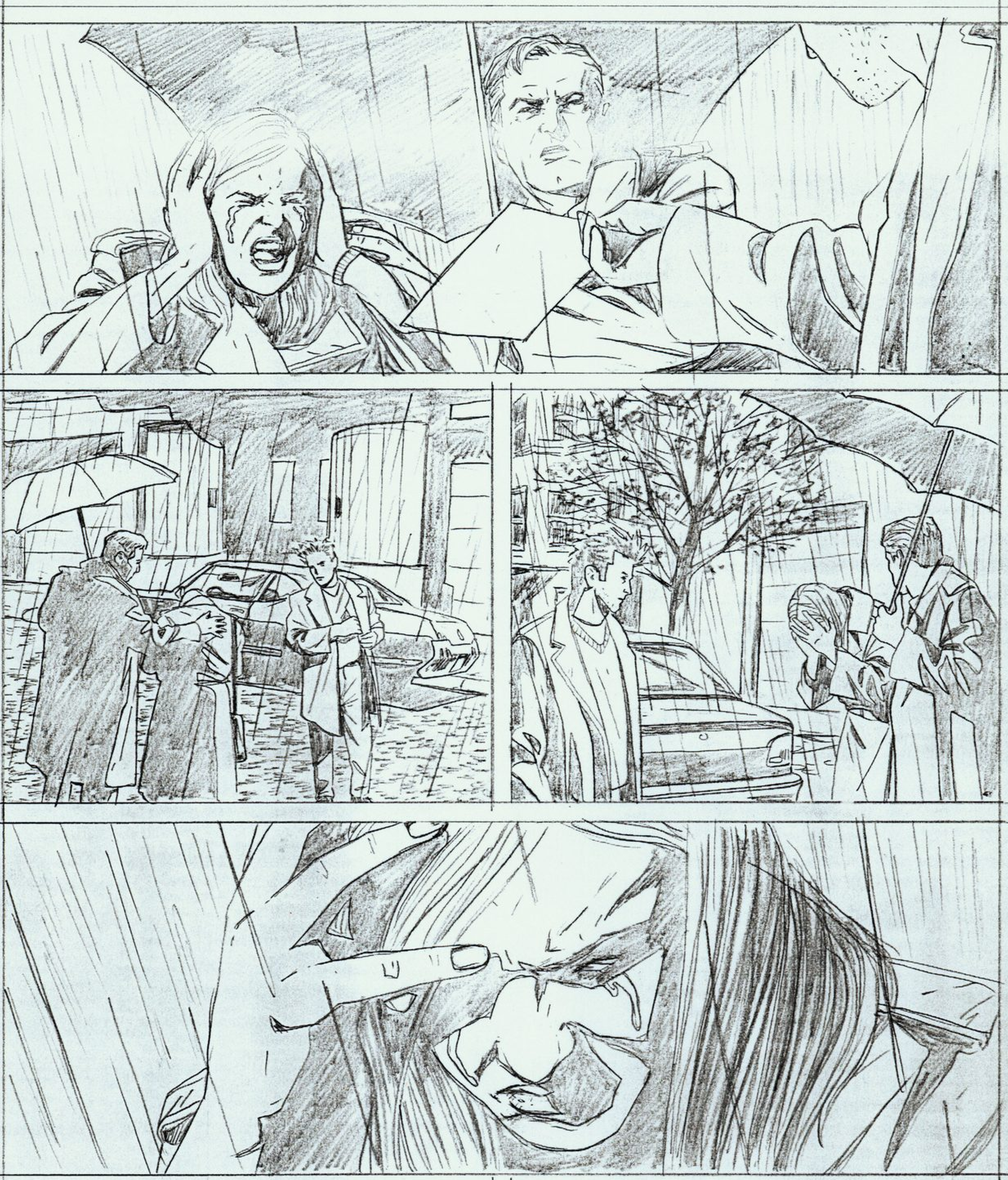

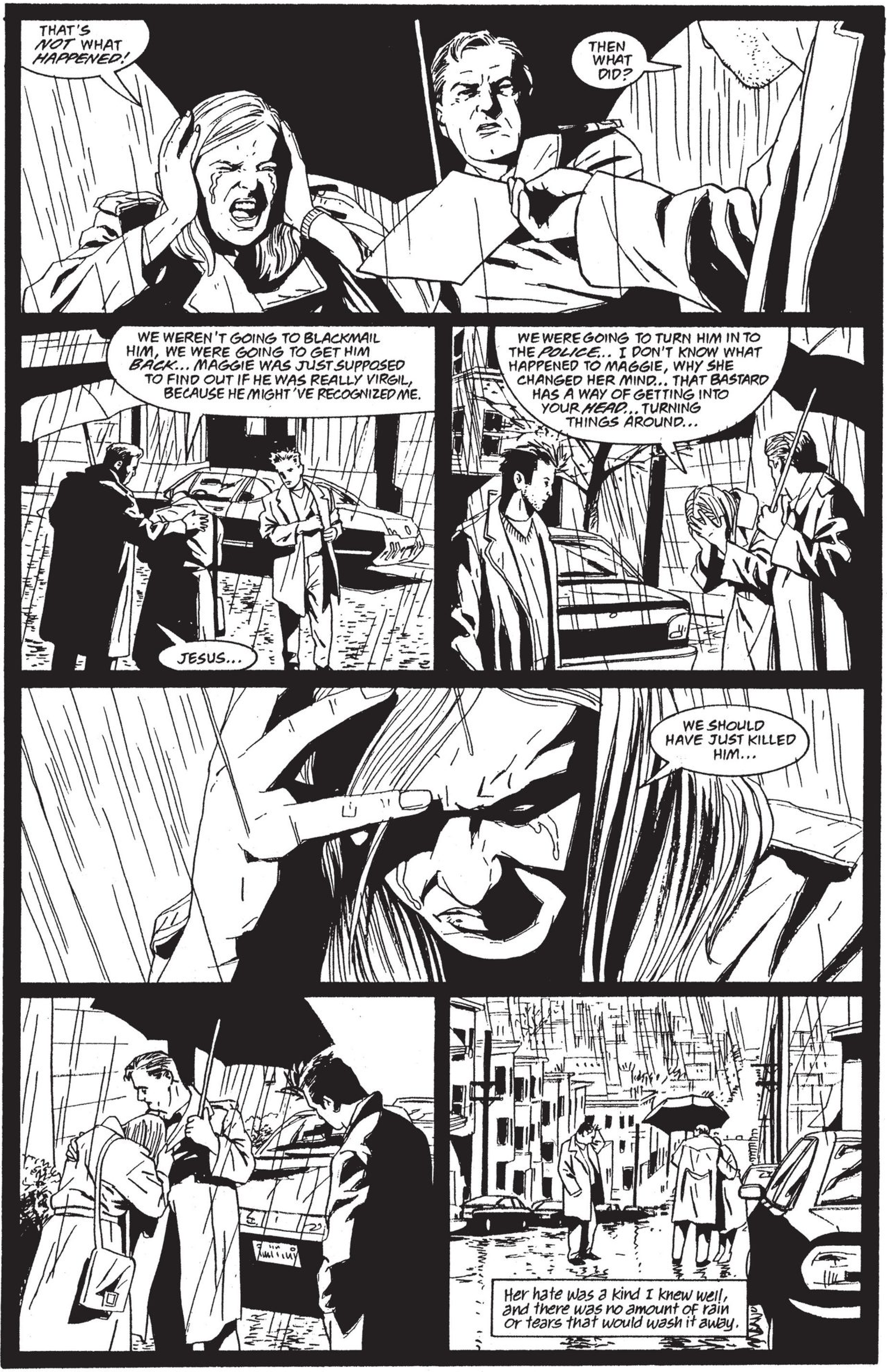
THAT'S *NOT* WHAT *HAPPENED!*
THEN WHAT DID?
WE WEREN'T GOING TO BLACKMAIL HIM, WE WERE GOING TO GET HIM *BACK*... MAGGIE WAS JUST SUPPOSED TO FIND OUT IF HE WAS REALLY VIRGIL, BECAUSE HE MIGHT'VE RECOGNIZED ME.
JESUS...
WE WERE GOING TO TURN HIM IN TO THE *POLICE*... I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO MAGGIE, WHY SHE CHANGED HER MIND... THAT BASTARD HAS A WAY OF GETTING INTO YOUR *HEAD*... TURNING THINGS AROUND...
WE SHOULD HAVE JUST KILLED HIM...
Her hate was a kind I knew well, and there was no amount of rain or tears that would wash it away.

Biographies

ED BRUBAKER at the SCREAM AWARDS 2011

Ed Brubaker has won the Best Writer Award in the Harveys and the Eisners five times since 2006. His work with Sean Phillips on Sleeper, Criminal, Fatale, and Incognito, has been translated around the world to great acclaim. He was raised partly on Navy bases, and began school in Cuba, on the Naval base at Guantanamo Bay. He credits being forced to go to his mother's AA meetings throughout much of his childhood with planting the seed of writing in his brain, and his father's love of comics and movies for nurturing it. He currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife and a cat and a dog, where he works in comics, film, and television. And he hates writing about himself in third person, but what's he gonna do?

Michael Lark is a Harvey and Eisner Award-winning artist who has been drawing comics for a variety of publishers for over 20 years. His work includes the award-winning Gotham Central (DC), Terminal City (Dark Horse), Captain America, Daredevil, Stephen King's Dark Tower, and Winter Soldier (Marvel). He is currently drawing the upcoming on-going series Lazarus, written by Greg Rucka and published by Image.

Drawing comics professionally since the age of fifteen, Eisner Award winning ***Sean Phillips*** has worked for all the major publishers. Since drawing Sleeper, Hellblazer, Batman, X-Men, Marvel Zombies, and Stephen King's The Dark Tower, Sean has concentrated on creator-owned books including Criminal, Incognito and Seven Psychopaths. As well as Fatale, he's currently just finished drawing another album, Void 01, for French publishers Delcourt.
He lives in the Lake District in the UK with his wife and three sons.

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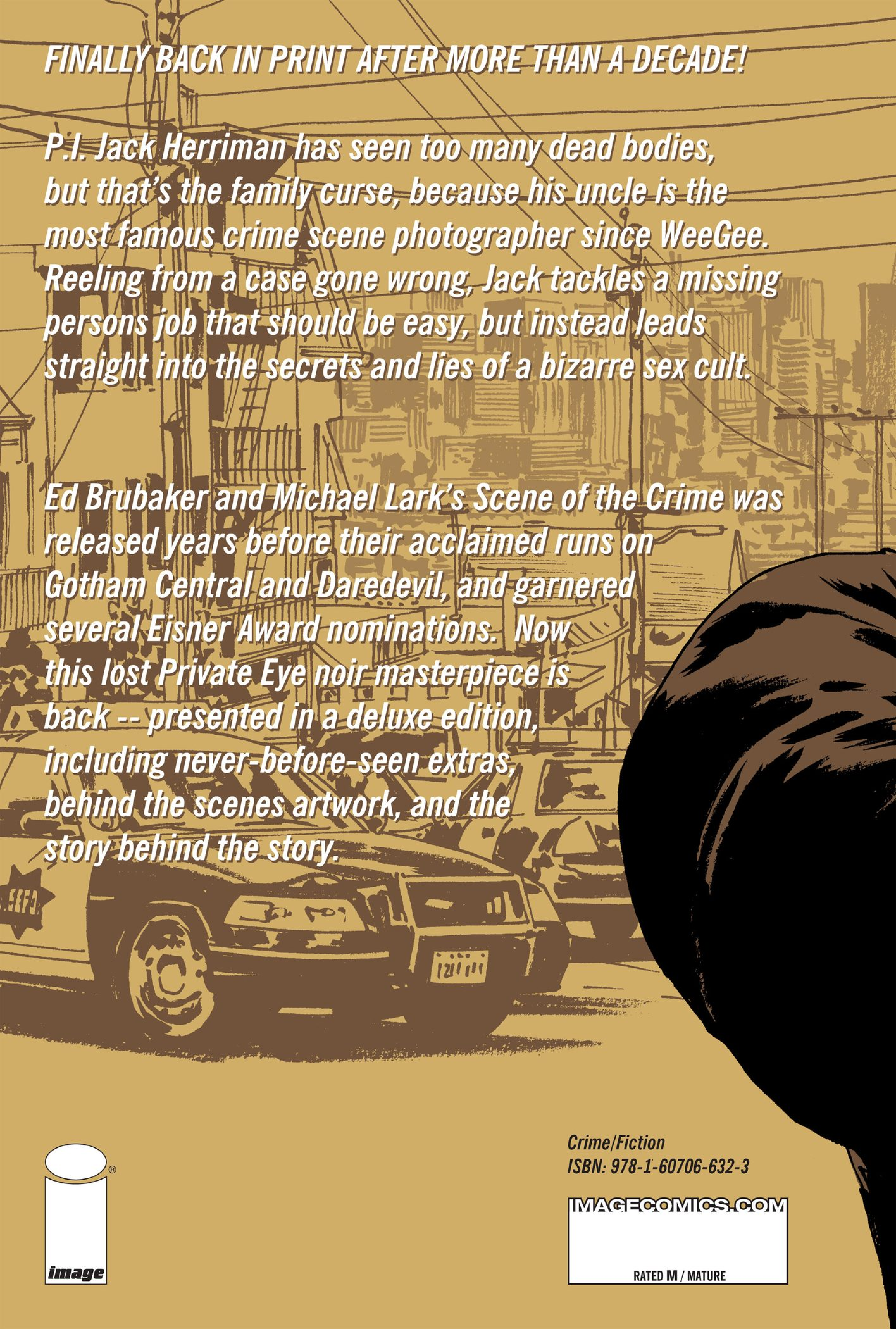

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